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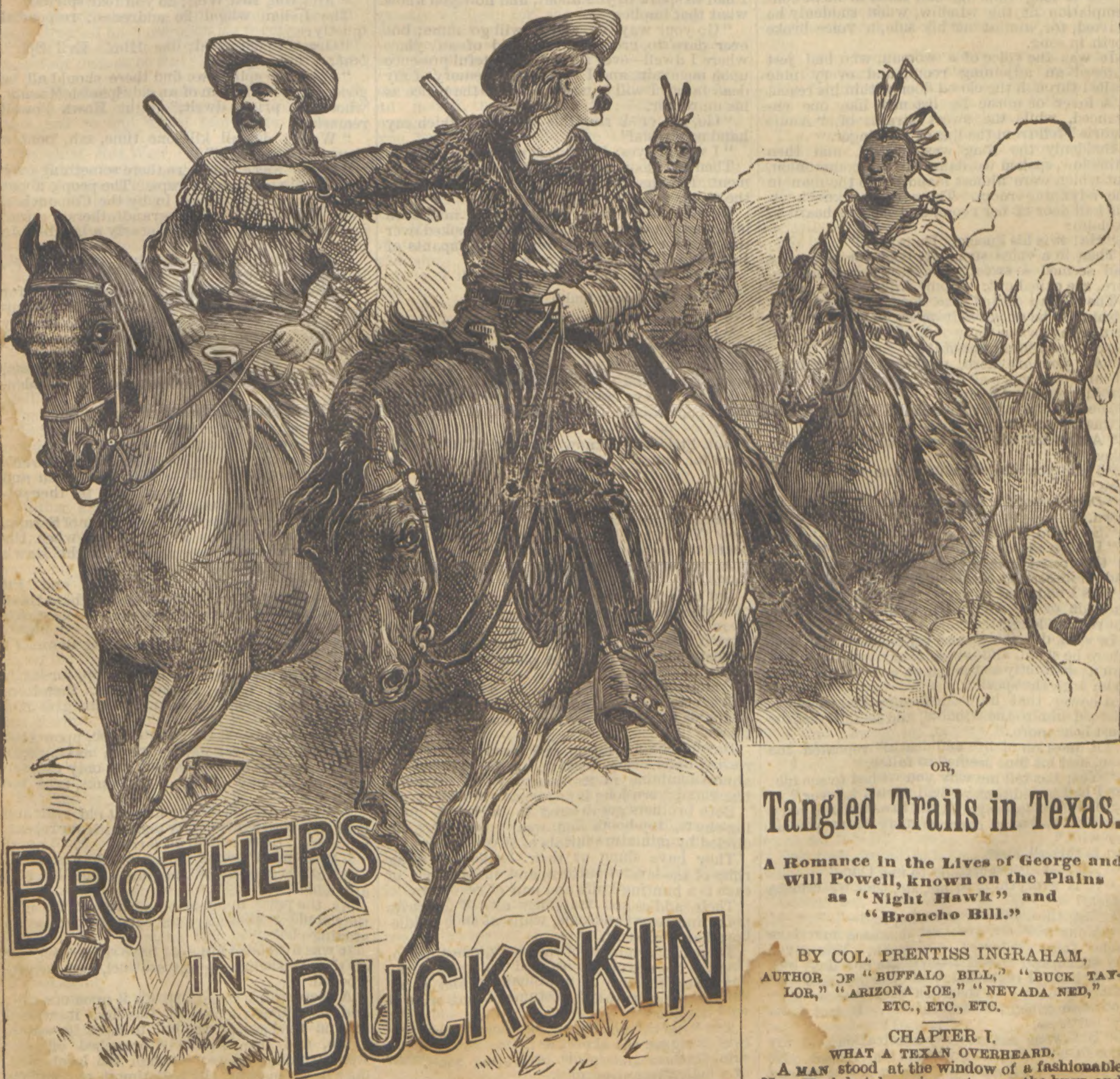
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OR,

Tangled Trails in Texas.

A Romance in the Lives of George and
Will Powell, known on the Plains
as "Night Hawk" and
"Broncho Bill."

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "BUFFALO BILL," "BUCK TAY-
LOR," "ARIZONA JOE," "NEVADA NED,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT A TEXAN OVERHEARD.

A MAN stood at the window of a fashionable
New York hotel, gazing out upon the busy and
interesting scene in the street below.
He was a man to attract attention anywhere,

"THERE IS OUR FUTURE HOME, SCRAPS," SAID WILL POWELL, ADDRESSING THE
NEGRO AND POINTING TO THE DISTANT HILL.

and especially in the confines of civilization, for he was tall, straight as an arrow, with a slender, elegant form, broad shoulders and the air of one who knew his own power.

His face was as clearly cut in every feature as though it were marble, the expression resolute, daring and fearless, while his eyes were as piercing as the bird's from whom he had won his border sobriquet of "Night Hawk."

Neatly dressed in city attire, he yet wore his raven black hair long, falling upon his shoulders, and his head was surmounted as he stood by the window, gazing out upon the thoroughfare, with a broad sombrero, encircled by a cord representing a miniature lariat.

The man looked just what he was, the thorough plainsman, and one gazing upon him as he stood there in his calm, easy pose, would have felt that he was a "man with a history"—one who had faced deadliest danger, had seen comrades die by his side and had himself made graves in the world.

George Powell was his name, and pure love of adventure had sent him to the Texas prairies, with his younger brother, William Powell, who will also figure in this story in "scenes that tried true men's souls."

Business of a private nature had called him East, and he had stopped over for a day in the great metropolis.

For a long time he had stood in silent contemplation at the window, when suddenly he started, for, almost at his side, a voice broke forth in song.

It was the voice of a woman, who had just entered an adjoining room, and every note welled through the closed door within his reach.

A lover of music he listened like one entranced, while the sweet strains of "Annie Laurie" fell from the lips of the singer.

Suddenly the song was hushed, and then came low, spoken words as if in self-communion, but which were almost inaudible to the man in the adjoining room. There came a knock on the hall door of her room, and she was heard to exclaim:

"Hal! it is his knock! He is here!"

Then in a voice strangely cold for one that had seemed so sweetly beautiful a moment before, she called out: "Come in!"

The Texan heard the door open, and not wishing to be an eavesdropper, he was about to turn away, when the words of the one who entered caused him to hesitate.

"Ah, you are here, my sweet singing-bird? I heard your voice as I came along the hall, and it told me what I knew."

There was evident sarcasm in the voice, and it was a man who spoke.

"And what did you know, sir?" the woman asked.

"That you dared not refuse to meet me here."

"Dared not?" and the tone was full of scorn.

"So I said, madam."

"I received your note, sir, asking me to come to this room at the hotel, to meet you, as you had an important communication to make."

"As I had that to say to you, sir, which is a question of life and death, I came; but I shall not remain long."

In vain did the Texan try to leave the spot where he stood, and where every word reached him as distinctly as though he were in the same room with the speaker.

A power that he seemed compelled to obey, chained him to the window, and he felt that he must hear more.

"A question of life and death?" repeated the man, and his tone seemed to falter.

"Yes; but tell me why you wished to see me, for I had hoped that we had parted forever."

"I wished to see you, Clio, to ask you to bury the past and to let me once more claim you as my wife."

"Is this all, sir?"

"All? It is everything to me, Clio."

"It is everything to me, sir, that we remain apart."

"But, Clio, you are my wife, and—"

"Your wife, sir, yes; but it was a marriage under false pretenses, so to speak. You saved my father and myself from death one day, but, often have I regretted that you checked our runaway horses in the Park and that we were not both killed that fateful day. It had been far better so."

"But your act won my admiration and my poor father's deepest gratitude and regard. He believed you a gentleman; a man of wealth, and when he was dying he asked me to become your wife. I did not love you, sir; but I knew you not as you are, and I consented."

"My father died, and his fortune was found to be only on paper."

"Alas! he knew this, and believing you rich, he sought to save me from poverty as your wife. But you, an adventurer, married me for the fortune I was supposed to be heiress to, and then you deserted me, after cruel abuse."

"Now, when I have the power to earn a fortune, you come back to me and ask me to once more acknowledge you as my husband."

She had spoken with ringing scorn in her voice. His manner was subdued, for he answered in a low tone:

"And will you not, Clio?"

"Never, sir."

"But you are my wife, and I can force you to obey me," he hotly replied.

An instant of intense silence followed, and then came the reply, in quivering accents:

"You can force me to obey you, sir? You coward! no power on earth can do that. I defy you, and I bid you now leave me, ere I call the officers of the law and hand you over to them as—"

"As what?" he almost gasped, as she hesitated.

"As my father's murderer!"

"Oh God!" broke from the lips of the man.

"Ah! you see that I know you as you are. I told you that it was a question of life and death I had to speak to you about, and now you know what that implies."

"Go your way, sir, and I will go mine; but ever dare to cross the threshold of any place where I dwell—ever force your hateful presence upon me again, and I vow by the memory of my dead father I will hand you over to the police as his murderer."

"Go, go! or I ring this bell upon which my hand now rests!"

"I will go, yes; but this is not our parting."

Then the door opened and closed, and a moment after the Texan heard the woman leave the room.

He had heard that which deeply interested him, and he went to the office and looked over the register to see who were the occupants of Room No. 13, next to his own.

He read there:

"Mr. and Mrs. John Smith, Boston."

"Who are these parties?" he asked the clerk.

"I do not know, sir; they only had the room for the day, doubtless passing through the city, for they have gone, the lady just driving off in one carriage and the gentleman in another."

"Well, I have nothing to do with them, so let them go," mused George Powell, as he turned away.

But, little did he know what the future had in store for him.

CHAPTER II.

A GHOST IN THE TRAIL.

SEVERAL months after the incident in the New York hotel, when George Powell overheard the secret of parties wholly unknown to him, he is seen riding across the prairies of Texas.

But he is not alone, for others are with him, one, alike him in face, not so tall in form, yet wearing the same look of daring. It is William Powell, whose sobriquet of "Broncho Bill" is far better known upon the plain than his own name.

Compactly built, and quick as a flash in his movements, he also possesses wonderful strength, while his fearless nature is the same as his brother's.

But for the resolution and manly expression resting upon every feature, his face would be almost feminine in its beauty, while his hair, black and worn long is as fine as a woman's.

Both brothers are dressed in buckskin, hunting-shirts, top-boots and wear sombreros encircled by miniature lariats of silver cord.

They have slung at their backs repeating rifles of the largest pattern, and in the belt of each is a hunting-knife and pair of revolvers.

Their saddles and trappings are of Mexican make and very handsome, while at each saddle-horn hangs a lariat.

There are two more of the party, one a negro, black as the ace of spades, and an Indian who has the appearance of a Comanche, and is attired in the picturesque costume of that tribe of wild horsemen.

The "dark," not to be outdone by the red-skin, is rigged out almost as gorgeously in buckskin, feathers and beads, presenting somewhat of a ludicrous appearance.

All four are superbly mounted, and, trotting along behind the negro are half a dozen fine mustangs, bearing packs.

At a slow pace the horsemen are going over the prairie, while ahead of them looms up a bold hill, covered with heavy timber.

"There is our future home, Scraps," said Will Powell, addressing the negro and pointing to the distant hill.

"Marsa Billy, yer knows, sah, that I hain't afeerd o' no man as hops on two legs; but I doesn't like yer idee o' going to lib in a ole ruin chu'ch, sah, whar folks libed and died a hundred year ago, and tha'r bones is still a-restin'." Scraps returned, soberly.

"We won't disturb their bones, Scraps," laughed Broncho Bill, who had won his name from his superb mastery of the wild bronches of the plains, and the great number he had caught.

"No, sah, but dey will disturb us," quickly answered the serving-man.

"What, the bones, Scraps?" asked Night Hawk George Powell.

"No, sah, ther sperrits," was the solemn response.

"You don't believe in spirits, do you, Scraps?"

"Yas I do, Mars' Night Hawk—I does, fer a fact, sah, for I has seen ghosts in my time—raal ghosts, sah!"

The two brothers laughed, and Broncho Bill said:

"And you, Red Wolf, do you fear spirits?"

The Indian whom he addressed, responded quietly:

"Great Spirit good; like Him. Evil Spirit bad; 'fraid of him!"

"Well, the spirits we find there should all be good, for it is the ruin of an old Spanish Mission, where the priests dwelt," Night Hawk Powell remarked.

"Wasn't dey all kilt one time, sah, 'bout a thousand years ago?"

"There was a massacre there something over a hundred years ago, Scraps. The people about the Mission were driven in by the Comanches, some of Red Wolf's great grandfathers, I guess, and all were put to death, nearly a hundred in number."

"A hundred ghosts? Lordy!" cried Scraps, in evident terror.

"There are more ghosts than that, Scraps, for it had been a Mission for a long time and many had been buried there, while they fought bravely and a great number of red-skins were killed and buried over in the timber near by."

"Does yer think thar is two hundred ghosts, Mars' Night Hawk?" asked Scraps, in a calculating tone.

"I guess about that many."

"And wimmen was massacred too, sah?"

"Yes, women, and children also."

"Oh, Lordy! Priestises, wimmin's, children's and Injuns' ghosts! Mars' Bill, s'pose you and Mars' Night Hawk lets me go back ter ther settlement until you gits settled there."

The brothers laughed at the real fear of Scraps, who was as brave as a lion except when the supernatural was concerned, and Night Hawk said:

"Scraps, we can't spare you, and I'll vouch for it that you will not see anything there to be afraid of, in the ghost line at least, for Broncho and myself stayed there two nights once, while on a trail, and nothing disturbed us."

"It is the very place for us to camp, for it has the name of being haunted, and, therefore, Texans, Mexicans, and even red-skins give it a wide berth."

"Just see how it is situated, too, upon that hill, which the river winds around, making it in the shape of a horseshoe, and the only place to cross, on account of the high banks, is at the ford."

"Why, we could sit up in that old ruin and hold that ford against fifty men, with our repeating rifles," Broncho Bill declared.

"Make more ghosts," suggested Scraps.

"Make heap graves," the Indian chief laconically added.

As the party approached nearer to the hill, they could realize more fully its strength as an abiding-place.

It was a wooded hill, as I have said, rising out of the prairie like a giant sentinel, and heavily wooded.

A deep prairie stream struck it upon one side, and its current changed thereby, it wound around the base of the hill to meet its waters again, and then suddenly branched off and went winding its way through the level plain once more, making the spot almost a complete island.

Just where the stream met was the ford, and there, in the olden time the dwellers in the

Mission had cut a road up to the ruins still existing upon the crest.

As they drew nearer the last rays of the setting sun were penetrating the timber and lighting up the ruin of the old Mission House and Chapel, and Scraps eyed them with a look of awe.

When at last the ford was reached darkness had fallen upon the prairie and grim and gloomy the hill rose before them.

But, knowing the way, Night Hawk and Broncho Bill rode boldly into the stream, Red Wolf following and Scraps slowly bringing up the rear, his eyes riveted upon the somber woods.

Suddenly he called out in startled tones:

"Hold up, Mars' Night Hawk! Seedah, Mars' Broncho! Ef dat hain't a ghost yer kin kill me," and the frightened negro pointed to a white-robed form that suddenly appeared in the trail before them and standing in the very edge of the timber, looking indeed most ghostly in the weird twilight.

CHAPTER III.

LASSOING A PHANTOM.

THE anxious eyes of Scraps had seen the weird form near their trail, even before the Powell brothers had done so, for they were not expecting to behold a ghost suddenly stand before them.

"Don't shoot, Bill! but try your lasso," cried Night Hawk, checking Will Powell, as he suddenly dropped his hand upon his revolver.

"Don't shoot, but scoot!" cried Scraps, and in another instant he was plunging back through the ford.

Broncho Bill was considered the deadeast hand at lariat-throwing in Texas, as his brother well knew, and so had urged him to use the lariat now.

The chief, Red Wolf, caught the pack-horses, which Scraps had let go, and remained motionless; Night Hawk also kept at a stand-still, while Broncho Bill, seizing his lariat, spurred forward.

As he did so the white form suddenly waved its arms and a sepulchral voice cried:

"Back! enter not the domain of the dead!"

But, Will Powell did not hesitate; on bounded his mustang, his rider upright in his saddle and whirling the coil around his head.

As he neared the form in white, it suddenly turned and fled like a deer through the timber.

"Catch him, Bill, but don't harm him," cried Night Hawk.

And after the apparition went Bill at full speed.

The timber was thick and he could not throw his lariat, so he dropped the coil over his saddle-horn and devoted himself to guiding his mustang in the dangerous chase, for he was threatened each moment with being dashed to death against a tree.

Gliding along at a wonderful speed, dodging here and there, and seeming to know the ground well, the form in white, phantom, or whatever it was, tried hard to throw its pursuer off the track; but, as steadily as a hound upon the trail, Broncho Bill kept his mustang upon the track of the fugitive, and soon pursued and pursuer dashed into an open space surrounding the old ruined chapel.

There were graves all about, and over them leaped the fugitive, and high above them bounded the mustang, Broncho Bill now seizing his lariat once more.

On fled the white-robed form over the graves and toward the ruined chapel, while Broncho Bill came in hot pursuit whirling his lariat, and Night Hawk was following close at his heels.

A few more bounds and the phantom would reach the chapel.

But suddenly the lariat left the hand of Broncho Bill, and a wild shriek rung out through the woods, and the coil settled over the flying form.

Broncho Bill's mustang stopped short, but the young plainsman did not let go the lariat end, and thus broke the shock, though the fugitive was checked quite suddenly.

Throwing himself from his horse as he dashed onward, while Broncho Bill held the fugitive with his lasso, Night Hawk rushed forward and grasped the weird form in a grip that could not be shaken off.

"Oh, spare me, senor!"

The supplication came in a woman's voice, and instantly Night Hawk released his grasp, while he said earnestly:

"Pardon me, madam! I did not suspect I would find a woman here."

"I am a woman, and one who has suffered much. Are you Americanos?" and the woman spoke with a marked accent.

"Yes, senora, and you are Spanish?"

"No, Mexican; but, if you are not Mexicans, I feel I can trust you. I feared you belonged to the band of San Cruz," and the woman shuddered.

"Oh, no, we are not Cowboy Pirates, as San Cruz and his band are called, but honest prairie-men. Who is here with you?"

"Not a soul."

"You mean what you say, senora?"

"Upon my honor, yes, senor."

"And you have been here how long alone?"

"For over two years. But you will not betray my secret, senors?"

"We know no secret to betray, senora," said Broncho Bill, who had approached and stood regarding the phantom-like being he had lassoed.

"My secret of being here. Oh! you will not betray me, senors!" and she clasped her hands together in a pleading way.

"No; but we wish to have a talk with you, as we have come here to camp."

"Broncho, will you go and send Red Wolf after Scraps, for he will never stop running until he reaches San Antonio, and I will await your return here, and in the mean time build a fire so as to see about us."

Broncho Bill sprang into his saddle and rode away through the timber, and Night Hawk turned again to the woman, who he saw was greatly excited, for she was trembling and wringing her hands.

"My dear senora, I beg you to calm yourself, for we mean you no harm."

"We have come here to camp for a few months, perhaps longer, and besides my brother and myself, there is an Indian, our friend, and a negro, our servant, who ran away at sight of you, believing that you were a spirit from the grave."

"Far better, perhaps, it would be were I in my grave, senor; but let me tell you that I have masqueraded as a ghost to keep all away from this old ruined Mission."

"Men fear the supernatural, where they have no fear of their fellow-man, and the strange, sad story which hangs about this ruin, the graves of its many dead, have been my safeguard."

"No one ever comes here, you think?"

"In the time that I have been here but two have come."

"One night they camped here, and I knew not of their presence until I returned from fishing over on the other side of the mill, and saw their camp-fire."

"They left at dawn and did not see me."

"It was my brother and myself, for we were here about a year ago, while wild-horse-hunting, and remained one night."

"Three years ago we were here also, but it was in the daytime, and curiosity alone brought us to see the old ruin."

"It is a desolate place for a woman to dwell, and alone."

"It is a better place to me than where I would be were I known to be—but no! no! you will not ask me to betray my secret, will you, senor?"

"You will let me remain here in hiding, and I will bless you, will pray for you."

"I have a little room in the ruined chapel, and there I remain, and I have subsisted on what game I shot and fish I caught, for both are most plentiful."

"Do not disturb yourself, senora, for your secret is safe, and you are free to remain as long as you please, for, as you hold the fort, as it were, it is for my brother and myself to ask your permission to stay here," said Night Hawk.

"Ah, senor, I have no home, no friends, and gladly would I have you and your friends remain, if you only will not betray me."

"You may quiet your fears upon that score."

"And you will not ask me who I am, or why I am here?"

"Certainly not, for I have no right to pry into your secret."

"And your brother?"

"He is here, so you can ask for yourself, and receive his answer as you have mine."

Just then Broncho Bill rode up and said with a laugh:

"You frightened Scraps about half out of his wits, lady, and I doubt if Red Wolf can catch him; but I have brought the pack-horses, George, so we can soon have supper."

"This lady, Will, has some reason for hiding away here, and she wishes your promise, as she has mine, not to betray her presence to any one, or to seek to solve the mystery of her being in hiding in this desolate place?"

"Certainly she shall have it; but she must

have cruel foes to drive her to hiding here alone," answered Broncho Bill.

"And those with you will not betray me?" asked the woman.

"Oh, no, and if we can ever find Scraps, our negro servant and pard, you will find him a good fellow, I assure you—ah! there they come now, for there are two horses approaching," and as Broncho Bill spoke, Red Wolf came out of the timber, followed by Scraps, who approached most cautiously, greatly surprised to discover that the "ghost" had been caught, and was standing so quietly near Night Hawk and Broncho Bill.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LIFE CHASE.

SOME two years previous to the opening of this story, two men were flying for their lives across the Texas prairie.

One was a white man, the other a negro.

They were well mounted and armed, and yet their horses were fagged under the terrific pace they had been held at for several hours.

Behind them came a party of Comanches riding in hot pursuit, and lashing their horses hard to overtake the fugitives.

When they would gain a little and come too close, so that their arrows fell unpleasantly near, the fugitives would halt, raise their rifles and fire, and almost immediately, a mustang or a warrior would go down, and the red-skins would drop back out of the range of the deadly rifles.

But they would once more push on, feeling that they were driving the already tired horses of the fugitives at a pace they could not long keep up, and, once brought to bay, they could end the matter to suit themselves.

The white man was young, scarcely over twenty-five years, and his face was refined, handsome, and intelligent, though darkly bronzed by prairie winds and sunshine.

The negro was the one whom the reader afterward met as the companion of Night Hawk and Broncho Bill Powell.

"It looks bad for us, Scraps," said the young man, as his horse stumbled badly with fatigue.

"Yes, Mars' Henry, it do look bad, sah; but we hain't dead yit."

"No, Scraps, but somehow I have a foreboding of evil, as ill fortune has dogged my steps sadly of late years."

"It hab, for a fact, Mars' Henry; but don't say die, sah, for I guess all will come round right."

"You are a plucky fellow, Scraps, to extract hope out of the present situation; but candidly, old fellow, I don't care much if I do go, only I am sorry I brought you here to perish on these prairies."

"I hain't perished yit, sah, and nuther has you, Mars' Henry."

"Fact is, sah, you has been mighty blue ever since dat New York lady done broke off her engagement ter marry yer, sah, and when yer went home from de army and found old massa and missus dead, yer did git sorrerful indeed, and it were me, sah, advised yer ter sell out ther old home and come ter Texas and start a ranch, so don't blame yerself fer coming, sah, but me, and you has a nice little ranch, and ef them Injuns will jist let us git back ag'in, why thar won't be no trouble, sah."

"Well, Scraps, you are true as steel, and I hope we can pull through; but, somehow, I have a presentiment of evil."

"But if I do get killed, and you escape, you will find among my papers in the cabin, my will, which leaves the little I have to you."

"Lordy, Mars' Henry, don't talk so, sah."

"I mean it, Scraps. I have no near kindred I care for, and you have been my friend, even when you were my father's slave on the old Alabama plantation, and what I have you shall have, for it is but little—Ah!"

The man reeled in his saddle, and Scraps uttered a cry as he saw an arrow bury itself in the back of his master.

Seeing that his master still kept his saddle, the negro, with a revengeful light flashing in his eyes, drew his horse to a standstill and leveled his rifle.

With the crack an Indian fell dead from his pony, and Scraps was preparing to fire again, when suddenly a wild cheer came to his ears, and over a rise in the prairie rode a squad of cavalry, a dozen in number.

The Indians turned in flight, carrying off their dead with them, and the cavalymen pressed on in pursuit, seeming not to see the wounded white man and the negro.

"Mars' Henry, you kin git to the timber yonder, I kin fix your wound all right, sah."

"I fear it is fatal, Scraps, but I can ride that far," was the calm reply.

On toward a large plot of timber they rode, the wounded man seeming to suffer greatly, yet still keeping in the saddle, while Scraps rode near to support him.

At length the timber was reached, and aiding his master to dismount, Scraps drew the arrow from the wound and quickly placed his blanket upon the ground, and made as comfortable a bed as he could.

The horses were then staked out, and Scraps said:

"I will go, sah, and find some water somewhere."

"Thank you, Scraps, and God bless you."

"Dont talk that way, Mars' Henry, for you makes me feel bad."

"I told you, Scraps, I had a presentiment of evil; but are the soldiers and Indians in sight?"

"No, sah, they has gone away over the rise in the prairie a long distance off."

"Well, go after the water, my good friend, and if I should die before you return, I may ask that you send the miniature and letters, in my little tin box at the ranch, back to the address on them."

"Send them by Express, Scraps, and write a line saying how I died, and that I asked you to send the things back to her."

"I'll do it, sah; but Lordy! Mars' Henry, you is a long way from dyin', sah."

"But I'll go and git the water, sah," and Scraps hastened away, his eyes blurred with tears, his broad breast beating convulsively with the grief that filled his soul, for in his heart he feared that his master, whom he dearly loved, had received his death-wound.

CHAPTER V.

IN HARD LUCK.

GOING through the timber, hunting for water, it was a long time before Scraps could find any.

But at last he came upon a spring, and hastily filling his canteens, he rose to retrace his way to his young master, fearing to find him dead.

As he did so, he suddenly beheld an Indian creeping upon him.

Scraps carried his belt of arms but he had left his rifle behind, and hastily drawing a revolver he fired, just as an arrow whizzed by his head.

He saw the right arm of the red-skin drop to his side, and he was about to give him another shot to finish him, when with wild yells a half-dozen of red-skins bounded toward him.

He saw that they were between him and his wounded master, and that they had come from that direction.

That they had killed the wounded man he could not but believe, and there was but one thing for him to do, and that was to run for his life.

He was fleet of foot, and, to his surprise and delight, the Indians were not mounted he saw.

So away he bounded at a great pace.

The Indians, like a pack of hounds, started in chase, sending arrows flying about him as he ran.

Scraps had always prided himself upon his running and staying powers.

He had never, as a boy on the old plantation in Alabama, found his equal among his comrades.

He now was glad to see that his speed was of use to him.

It soon began to tell and he drew ahead of his pursuers.

Out of the timber he was forced to go, but another motte was not far away, and toward this he ran.

Looking back over the prairie, he saw that there were just nine Indians in chase.

But, fast as they ran, Scraps ran faster, and he crossed the mile of prairie to the second group of timber in a very short while.

And, better still, he arrived there far ahead of his pursuers.

To his delight he beheld there a small log cabin.

It was rudely built, but stout and small, evidently the home of some solitary hunter in that part.

There was a rude door, made of small saplings tied together with buckskin thongs and hung with ropes; but a bar of wood closed it, and Scraps felt secure.

He quickly selected peep-holes on each side, and was ready to die game.

It was growing dark, but in the distance Scraps saw the red-skins enter the timber, and then they took shelter behind the largest trees.

Then darkness came on, and the negro was alone with his painful meditations.

Soon afar off he heard the mournful howl of a wolf.

It was repeated three times, and it made the brave negro shudder.

Taking off his boots, he crept from side to side, peering out through the crevices between the logs.

But not an Indian could he see.

Not a sound did he hear.

The silence was awful, the darkness was intense, and the suspense was a fearful strain upon his nerves.

But through the long hours of the night Scraps remained on watch, his thoughts far away with the wounded man, whom he felt sure the Indians had killed, if they had not found him already dead.

At last the gray of dawn was visible, and soon after it became light.

Then the sun arose, but not a red-skin was to be seen.

"I guesses they is lying hid for me to come out, for they has as much patience as a cat watching a rat-hole," muttered Scraps.

But the time passed, and no Indian showed himself.

It was noon, and Scraps began to narrowly watch every tree, taking different ones in turn, hoping to catch a movement behind them.

But at last he could stand it no longer.

He was tired, hungry, enraged, and he longed to know his master's fate.

"I'll fight 'em and die for it! I can't stand this no longer."

So saying, he opened the door softly and crept out into the timber.

Not a soul did he see.

"Lordy! Has they give me up and gone?" he muttered.

It seemed so, for as he continued on his way, no red-skin was in sight.

"Now dem red Injuns was wrong, for when dey tree a coon dat's de time to stay dar and git him."

"Dey had me tree'd, and yet dey has gone."

"I hopes I hain't too previous in my solutions of de case; but it do strike me dey hab gone."

So saying, Scraps started on the trail he had come, back to the spot where he had left his master.

He crossed the prairie cautiously, approached the timber with the greatest care and then entered it.

Going with the same stealthy tread, he passed through the timber to where he had left his wounded master.

Not an Indian was in sight; but as he approached the spot, a pack of wolves and coyotes, with angry yelps and snarls, bounded away through the woods.

Scraps paused and passed his hand over his face, for he seemed to know what he would behold.

Then he moved forward once more.

An instant more, and, with a groan, he dropped down upon his knees by the side of a body which the wolves had torn to pieces, beyond all recognition other than that it was a human form.

"My poor, poor Mars' Henry," he cried in a choking voice.

At last he arose and with his knife set to work to dig a grave.

He dug it narrow and deep, and then gathering the remains together, he buried them with sacred earnestness, muttering over them prayers as he did so.

The grave was filled in, and over it fallen timbers were piled to protect it from the wolves.

Then Scraps sadly turned away.

The horses were gone, and along with them his rifle and the haversacks of food.

Worn out as he was, the poor fellow felt that the first thing he must do was to have rest, and so he ventured back to the little cabin in the other motte.

Gathering some wood he lighted a fire in the cabin, for he had matches with him, and then filling his pipe, sat down to smoke in place of eating before seeking the rest he so truly needed.

At last he lay down upon the floor, his feet to the fire, and sunk to sleep, almost indifferent to any danger that might befall him.

CHAPTER VI.

AN ALLY.

WHEN Scraps awoke, he was very stiff and sore, after his hard run.

He was ravenous for food, so decided to at once start out on the trail home to the ranch,

which he knew was some sixty miles away, and at the same time he hoped to kill some game of some kind.

"I'll kill a wolf, ef I can't git nothing else, though it's tough eating, and I guess a shade worse than tame dog meat," he muttered as he went along.

It was nearer for him to strike from the timber right across the prairie, as he took his bearings: but instead he went back to the motte wherein was the grave of the man who had been his comrade, his friend and his master.

As he drew near the spot he took his broad sombrero off, and dropping upon his knees said in a voice that quivered:

"Good-by, Mars' Henry, good-by."

"You was a noble man, and my friend, and may de goo' Lord bress you accordin'."

Breaking a twig from a tree that overshadowed the grave, he went slowly away, back through the timber.

He was about to walk boldly out upon the prairie, when he started back, as he saw horsemen approaching.

Fortunately there was a fallen tree near him, one blown down by a wind-storm, and falling in a thicket it afforded a splendid hiding-place.

After seeing that he had a place to which he could retreat, Scraps gazed out upon the prairie at the approaching horsemen.

He saw that two were white men, the other an Indian.

The latter he recognized at a glance, as a Comanche chief who had, for some reason, left his people, and was dwelling in the white settlements, having several times visited his master's ranch, and who had taken quite a fancy to the red-skin.

"It's Red Wolf, the Comanche, and sart'in as I lives, he is bound hand and foot."

"But who is dem white folks, I wonder?"

A closer survey of those who had the Indian a prisoner, seemed to satisfy Scraps, for he quickly beat a retreat to the fallen tree, while he said hastily:

"I knows 'em, and dey is Mexikins too."

"Dey is some of dem Cowboy Pirts dot Mars' Henry and me trail one time and hab a brush wid, but what got away."

"I'm gwine ter keep dark jist now; but if I kin git dot red Injun out ob dere hands, it's my duty to do so."

"Wonder if I can't scare 'em to let him go?"

The three horsemen were now pretty near to the motte, and Scraps did as he said he would—"kept dark."

The Indian was a noble looking specimen of his race, and sat his horse as only a Comanche can, and wore the feather head-dress, bear-claw necklace, and beaded hunting shirt of a chief.

He was well mounted, yet was bound to his horse, while his hands were tied behind him.

The two men who were with him, one riding upon either side and each holding a rein of the Indian's horse, were a villainous-looking pair.

From his intensely black hair and dark face, one was without doubt a Mexican, and the other appeared to be a half-breed Indian.

Both were well armed, and their horses, though thin, were good animals.

As they approached the timber they did so with the caution natural to one whose life is in constant danger.

They peered into the woods, and at last one rode forward alone.

Reaching the motte, he seemed satisfied and soon after beckoned to his comrade.

The other then advanced with the Indian.

From his hiding-place Scraps was getting ready to act, when the half-breed, who was in advance, called out in English:

"I say burn the durned red-skin here, for we don't want to be bothered with him any longer."

"You say, no take him to to camp?" asked the Mexican.

"No, what's the use, for the boys would kill him, and we can do that and have no more bother."

"Let's burn him!"

"All right, senor; burn him like Indian burn Mexicano, men," was the heartless reply.

The two men then made the Indian dismount, and bound him fast to a tree, while the half-breed said, in a voice that Scraps distinctly heard:

"You won't follow the trail of the Cowboy Pirates any more, I'm thinking, Injun, and tell the Texans where to find us."

"You have burned white people, so we'll serve you the same trick."

"Come, Marcos, let us get some brush to pile around him!"

As they turned to start for wood, a shot rung out and the half-breed dropped in his tracks.

The Mexican seemed accustomed to surprises, for in an instant, without stopping to see from whence had come the shot, or how many his foes, he bounded to the side of his horse, threw himself in his saddle and drove his Mexican spurs deep into the flanks of the animal. As the mustang, with an angry snort, dashed away, a shot whistled by the Mexican's head with a nearness that was very uncomfortable.

As fast as his horse could carry him the Mexican sped over the prairie, while out from his retreat came Scraps, revolver in hand.

"Hallo, Red Wolf, I am glad to see you," said the negro as he advanced.

But he stopped suddenly and glanced down at the half-breed.

"Let me see if dis gemman is dead, sah, afore I shakes hands wid you."

"Yas, he were hit right whar I aim, in de head."

"Now, Red Wolf, I oncommon glad to see you," and Scraps hastily freed the Indian of his bonds and grasped his hand.

"Red Wolf much glad too."

"Black Face save Red Wolf's life—he heap good friend."

"Where white chief?" said the Comanche with quiet dignity, which had not been disturbed even in his greatest danger.

"Ah, Injun, Mars' Henry am gone."

"Where gone?"

Scraps simply pointed his hand up toward the skies.

"Gone happy hunting-grounds?" and the Indian spoke with real feeling.

"Yes, Injun, Mars' Henry is dead; but hab you anything to eat about your clothes, for I kin talk better when I hain't so empty: it makes my voice sound like a base drum?"

"Eat then," and the Comanche pointed to the horse of the half-breed hitched near.

"Ah! and I've got a horse too, a real good mustang, and all for only killin' that yaller varmint; and Scraps quickly went to the half-breed's horse and was soon devouring a piece of jerked buffalo-meat and a pone of corn-bread, eating with an eagerness that showed how hungry he was.

In the mean time the Comanche took from the body of the outlaw all that was useful, and handed over the weapons and things to Scraps, who said:

"Now these do come in well; but whar did they cotch yer, Red Wolf?"

"Over on prairie in motte."

"Was on trail, and threw lariat on me."

"I see, and dey jist had you sa'ti'n dere."

"Waal, what yer gwine ter do now."

"Anything."

"S'pose we be friends and you go to ranch wid me, now Mars' Henry am gone?"

"Heap glad to go!"

"Then we is fixed."

"Now let's go and I'll show you whar Mars' Henry am buried, and then we'll stay ober in de cabin into the motte to-night, and strike out to-morrow for Ranchero's Rest, as my poor marster called our home in de pararies."

So saying Scraps mounted the half-breed's horse, and the Comanche springing upon his own mustang, the two set off together, leaving the dead body as the negro expressed:

"To pizen coyotes with."

CHAPTER VII.

USURPERS.

It was several days before Scraps and the Indian chief arrived at the Ranchero's Rest, the home of the unfortunate young man who had sought an abiding-place upon the Texas border.

They had gone by Red Wolf's cabin, some score of miles distant from Ranchero's Rest, for the Indian to get his traps and carry them with him to his new home, for a warm friendship had sprung up between the chief and Scraps and they had decided to be allies for life.

The young ranchero had brought with him to Texas a snug sum of money, and had invested it in cattle and mustangs.

He had a complete outfit for himself and Scraps and had carried all out to the spot he had selected as his home in an ambulance which he had purchased.

Several cowboys whom he had hired, had driven his cattle out for him and then had helped to build his cabin, which was a structure of three rooms and strong as a log fort.

It was well located under the shelter of a hill and upon the banks of a small stream.

In the rear was a stockade where the cattle, several hundred in number, were corraled at suspicion of danger, but which at other times were allowed to run free on the prairies, guarded

by two cowboys in the employ of the ranchero.

With a comfortable room to dwell in, Scraps a good cook, and plenty of provisions, a number of books, his guitar, horses, firearms, dogs, and cattle, the young ranchero had taken life easily, though upon his career a shadow had fallen, and he seemed to care never again to go back to the scenes of civilization, which he had been so well suited to adorn, for he had graduated high in his class as a West Point cadet, and as a lieutenant of cavalry had already won fame upon the frontier, when suddenly he had resigned his commission, giving no reason for so doing, and returning to Alabama, had sold his old home, and sought a retreat in the wilds of Texas, the faithful Scraps following his fortunes into his self-imposed exile.

It was while on an extended hunt with Scraps that they had been surprised by Comanches, and the race for life had begun, which had ended so sadly in the motte.

The two cowboys who had been left in charge of the ranch, the young ranchero knew nothing about.

He had employed them to look after his cattle, and they had attended to their duties well, though they were by no means companionable to him, and appeared to be of the desperado class from their looks and style of conversation.

Upon his return to the ranch with Red Wolf, Scraps saw these two men seated in front of the little cabin, while their horses, ready saddled, were grazing near, ready for use if needed.

Out upon the prairie the cattle and mustangs of the young ranchero were feeding, and under the eyes of the two cowboys.

"Waal, Scraps, whar in thunder is the boss?" asked Nick Rawlings, one of the cowboys, and a tall, gaunt fellow, with the strength of an ox.

"Mister Nick, and you Mister Sim Lucas, my poor marster is dead," said Scraps, sadly.

The two cowboys sprung to their feet in surprise, and Nick Rawlings cried:

"Dead! Is Pard Henry dead?"

"Yas, Mister Rawlings, he am dead and buried, for I dug his grave," and then Scraps went on to tell the sad story as the reader knows it.

The two cowboys seemed greatly impressed, and walked apart and talked together for quite awhile.

Then they returned to where the negro and Indian were standing, and Nick Rawlings said:

"Scraps, I'm awful sorry about yer master, but as I knows all about what he wanted done ef he got kilt, I'll just take holt, and bein' as he owes me considerable money, I'll hold on to ther ranch and ther critters ontill ther estate are settled up for the niggest of his kin."

"Mister Rawlings, Mars' Henry left me words as ter what ter do with what he leaves behind him, and thar is a box, as has his papers in it to show for it, and other things I is ter look arter, besides considerable gold."

"Give me the box then, Scraps."

"No sah. I keeps de box, for I has a duty to perform for my dead master, and I knows that he only owed you and Mister Sim Lucas one month's pay, when it am due on ther fu't o' ther month, which are several days off yit, sah."

"But I'll pay you that, gemman."

"He owes me a very large sum, nigger, which I loaned him."

"Why did he borror money from you, sah, when he had a neat little sum in de box?"

Nick Rawlings's face wore an ugly look, but Sim Lucas made a sign to him to restrain his temper, and so he asked:

"And what do you intend to do, Scraps?"

"Mars' told me, sah, to stay here on de ranch, and tend ter certain matters for him."

"Well, did he speak of Sim and me?"

"No sah, and I'll pay yer what are due yer, and then I guess me and ther Injun kin look arter ther cattle and bronchos, gemmen."

Again Nick Rawlings was about to break out into a passion, but was restrained by Sim Lucas, who said:

"That's all squar', pard, and Scraps hes ter do as he are told."

"You will hev ter lose yer money thet Pard Henry owed yer, but we kin git our wages, and then we'll go; but we'll help yer out, Scraps, ontill the end of the month, and then you kin pay us."

Scraps did not like this plan in the least.

He wished to get rid of the cowboys; but yet he could not order them off, and so decided to put up with matters as they were until the end of the month, which would be three days longer.

He dared not go to the hiding-place of the tin box, for he was half afraid the two men meant

mischievous, and he knew that there was nearly a thou-and dollars of gold and some important papers in the box.

But Nick and Sim kept an eye upon him, and one of them was constantly with him.

They asked him to go with them to drive up the cattle when night came on, and in the next twenty-four hours neither the Indian or the negro could get out of their sight.

Then the second night came, and after having gone to bed both Scraps and Red Wolf were surprised by being awakened by a revolver shoved in their faces.

Their weapons had been removed, and, wholly at the mercy of the two cowboys, from whom they had not expected real treachery, they were compelled to submit, and while Nick Rawlings covered them with a revolver in each hand, Sim Lucas securely bound them.

"Now, nigger, I wants yer ter give us thet box, and durned quick," said Rawlings.

"Boss, I hain't a-gwine ter do it."

"You is dead meat ef yer don't."

"No, sah, I'll die afore I goes back on my dead marster, and you'll find I hain't got no chicken heart, ef niggers does love chicken meat," was the plucky response.

"Make the Injun tell, Nick," said Lucas.

"He don't know; but I does, and I doesn't intend ter tell, ef I dies for it."

"Waal, Sim, all we kin do is ter kill ther nigger and ther Injun and live here ourselves."

"This are a good ranch, the critters is fu't-class, and it jist suits our blood."

"Come here, Nick," and Sim Lucas led the way out of the cabin.

"Waal?"

"We kin jist sail around the kentry, git a few cowboys together, tell 'em ther nigger and ther Injun has kilt pard Henry, and then they'll string 'em up."

"Arter they hes done so, we kin easy find that box, which I hev seen Pard Henry looking inter often, and we'll jist own this ranch, you bet."

"It's a go, Sim, so you git the cowboys ter come, while I watches ther murderers," was the ready response.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TWO SCOUTS.

At the time that Scraps and his young master were "jumped" by the Comanches, and had to fly for their lives, two horsemen were making a flank movement, to avoid the band of Indians, which they had sighted from a distance, creeping upon, as they suppose, a herd of buffalo or deer.

When the Comanches started in full cry after the fugitives, the two horsemen referred to stopped short and looked at each other.

They were Night Hawk and Broncho Bill Powell.

They were at the time on a scout, to make a report to the commandant of a fort, who was meditating a move against the red-skins with all the force at his command.

Raising a field-glass which he carried to his eyes, Night Hawk took a long survey of the fugitives, and then of the Indians.

"One is a white man, Will, the other a negro, and they are well mounted, though their horses seem a trifle fagged."

"They must be that young ranchero and his negro servant we have heard about, living down near the river," replied Broncho Bill.

"Doubtless; but there are seventeen Indians in the party."

"If we could only have been nearer the fugitives than the Indians, we four could have stood them off."

"Yes, and as it is, Will, I think we can help them."

"Follow the reds?"

"Yes."

"They haven't seen us?"

"No."

"I'm ready."

"Well, we will see what we can do to help them."

So saying, the two scouts started off in a sweeping gallop in chase of the Indians.

The situation was as follows:

The surprised party had been camping upon a small stream for dinner and rest, and a mile distant the band of Indians had been watching them from a rise in the prairie, one of their scouts having discovered them and beckoned his comrades up to where they could get a view.

The two scouts had been riding directly toward the Indians, when, ascending a roll of prairie, they had cautiously looked over, and at once had discovered their foes.

To avoid them, as there were too many to fight, and get to their rear, they had moved to the right, while if they had gone to the left they would have come upon the rancho and the negro, whom they did not see.

When they had reached the rear of the red-skins they suddenly heard yells, and riding up to the top of the rise, beheld the cause.

Where they had supposed the Comanches were watching buffalo or deer, it was human game they were after.

When the Comanches saw the rancho and Scraps mount and ride from them, instead, as they had hoped they would do, of coming toward them, they at once ran back to their horses, mounted and gave chase, yelling loudly as soon as they saw that they were discovered.

The fugitives were hardly a mile in advance of the Comanches, while Night Hawk and Broncho Bill were double that distance behind them.

But the two scouts pressed on swiftly, though their horses, out on the trail for several days, were pretty well used up and they gained but slowly.

The ponies of the Indians, however, seemed to be quite fresh, and they gained upon the fugitives, who now and then gave them an admonition not to crowd them too closely, by a shot which told either on a warrior or mustang.

The scouts saw that the Comanches were closing up the gap, and they spurred more rapidly on, when suddenly over a rise to their right dashed a party of cavalry.

Instantly the scene changed.

The fugitives pressed on, seemingly unseen by the cavalry, while the Comanches turned in flight.

This caused the two scouts to also wheel and fly.

"The thing is reversed, George, for we are leading," said Broncho Bill, with one of his merry laughs.

"Yes, and we have got to keep going until the cavalry overhauls them, or there is some change in our favor," returned Night Hawk.

They felt no anxiety, as their horses were fleetlier than the Indian ponies, tired as they were, and if they should be overhauled too rapidly, they were well armed and could stand at bay and keep the red-skins from riding them down.

And so the flight continued until night came on, and then, quick as a flash the scouts verged to the left, unseen by the Indians, and, when they had thundered by, they fell in behind them, while loud and clear were their cries to the soldiers, who, in the darkness had lost sight of the savages.

Guided by the calls of the scouts, the cavalrymen came on, and the keen eyes of Night Hawk and Broncho Bill kept the Comanches in sight.

The troopers steadily gained, the scouts holding their own, so as not to let the Comanches dodge them in the darkness.

And thus the flight continued until at last the Indians took refuge in a small timber island and stood at bay.

The cavalrymen were from the fort, and all knew the scouts, so the young lieutenant in command was glad to have the aid and advice of two such thorough plainsmen as were the brothers.

The lieutenant had been acting with his men as an escort for a train going to the fort, and seeing Indian trails about, he had taken a part of his force to reconnoiter.

"We have got the scamps entrapped, Night Hawk; but what can we do now?" he asked.

"Surround the timber, lieutenant, and wait until morning, when we can close in upon them," was the reply.

This advice was carried out, and when the dawn broke the command was given to close in upon the motte.

But some of the soldiers moved too slowly, one's horse got loose, and seizing the opportunity, the Comanches made a dash in a compact mass and broke through the line.

A couple went down under the fire upon them, and a pony fell; but away went the others.

As soon as the trooper's horse was caught and all got together, the chase began again and continued half the day, when the Comanches were driven into a clump of timber.

"Charge them, lieutenant!" shouted Night Hawk, and without a halt the gallant but worn-out soldiers rushed upon the red-skins.

A soldier fell dead, a horse went down with his rider, two troopers were wounded, but the rest reached the goal and the battle was ended; the Comanches had gone to their happy hunt-

ing grounds, and a severe blow had been dealt upon the murderous tribe by the loss of their braves.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE TRAIL.

"NIGHT HAWK, but for you and Broncho Bill, I never would have gained this grand victory."

"Why, we have wiped them off the earth," said Lieutenant Dana, with earnestness, as he gazed upon the red field.

"It is a neat little victory, Lieutenant Dana, and has taken off the war-path a number of Comanches," replied Night Hawk, while Broncho Bill responded:

"They're booked for Injun heaven, that's certain."

"Do you want their scalps, lieutenant?"

"No, indeed, Broncho Bill, for it's a barbarous practice I could never adopt."

"Nor I, sir; but then you know a red-skin is only half-dead until he is scalped, and when you say dead Indian to the boys at the fort, you know their answer."

"Yes, Broncho, it is:

"Show your scalps'; but I'll take the ponies and the weapons of these Indians, and tired as our horses are we must be on the way back, for I'd never get forgiveness if anything happened to the train from my coming off so far."

"We'll guide you back, sir, by the nearest way, if you wish," said Night Hawk.

"I should be more than glad, for I brought no guide from the train, and I am little more than a tenderfoot myself, in frontier craft and Indian-fighting."

"You have done better than many an older man, sir, and your superior officers will swear at prayers to think they are not in your boots," Broncho Bill said.

The trophies were soon collected from the dead Indians, the bodies were decently buried, and the slain soldier was placed in a grave apart, his comrades standing with uncovered heads while the young officer repeated the burial service over him.

The wounded were then put on *travers*, which Broncho Bill arranged for them, and to which Indian ponies were fastened.

Then the party, with their captured ponies, started on the trail back to the wagon-train.

Under the guidance of Night Hawk and Broncho Bill, they pressed on until long after dark and then camped until dawn, when they again pressed forward and before noon the wagon-train was sighted.

Cheers greeted them as they rode up, for their comrades had feared harm had befallen them, as fresh Indian trails were numerous, and louder were the cheers when their victory was known.

The train went into camp for the noon rest, and when it pulled out once more, on its way to the fort, still a day and a-half's journey, Night Hawk and Broncho Bill turned the head of their horses in another direction.

"What! are you not going on with us?" asked Lieutenant Frank Dana, with surprise.

"No, sir, for we have talked it over and would like to find out about that young rancho and the negro, whom the Comanches were after," said Night Hawk.

"I told George that I thought I saw the rancho throw up his hands, as though he was wounded, though I might have been mistaken."

"But we will take the trail and see if we can discover anything," Broncho Bill remarked.

"Well, you two scouts certainly like danger, that is certain, and I regret to have you go, as your horses are not fresh and the red-skins are about as thick as buffalo; but I shall report your valuable services, I assure you."

And so the two scouts left the wagon-train and started together upon the trail.

They first directed their way to cross the track of the fugitives, and reached the spot almost where the young rancho had been wounded, so thorough was their knowledge of locality and their talent in plaincraft.

Taking the trail there they held on to the timber, arriving there just at sunset, and before them the pile of brush loomed up over the grave of the rancho.

"I fear you are right, Will, for there is a grave," said Night Hawk.

"Yes; but we will camp here until morning, and then find out whose grave it is," was the response of Broncho Bill.

CHAPTER X.

TRUE AS STEEL.

BOTH Scraps and Red Wolf felt that they were in a bad fix.

They were securely bound, and Nick Raw-

lings was their guard, for Sim Lucas had gone off to collect a few cowboys from distant ranches, to make numbers an excuse for murder.

The Comanche chief took his misfortune with the utmost indifference, to judge by his manner, for not an expression of his face showed dread of what he felt sure would happen.

Scraps was not so cool.

Any danger he would face fearlessly, with weapons in his hands; but bound hands and feet, he was pretty well unnerved by the situation.

His grief for his master was great, and he was most anxious to carry out his last instructions.

The rancho had had a safe hiding-place for the box, in a hollow tree near the cabin, and his manner of getting it from there, and returning it, was by throwing a lariat over a limb and climbing up the double line thus formed.

Then he could place the box in the cavity, or take it out at will.

But Scraps would not tell where it was, for he had made up his mind to that.

The fact that his master had left his will in that box, leaving him the ranch and cattle, and the gold he had on hand, was a pleasure to him, of course; but then he would have been far more glad to have the rancho alive than to be a millionaire.

When morning came the lazy cowboy unfastened Scraps's hands, but kept his feet hopped and then told him to get breakfast.

Scraps was hungry, and so he obeyed.

He got plenty for all three, and when they had finished their meal, the cowboy at once secured the negro again.

For a moment Scraps looked as though he was going to resist, and try conclusions with the armed man; but he saw that it would be madness, and so he submitted to being again bound.

"Now, Scraps," said Nick Rawlings, throwing a noose over his neck and hauling it taut, as he threw it over the limb of a tree under which the three were—

"Now, Scraps, I hain't got time ter wait until the boys come, so I'll jist string you up now, if you don't do as I axes yer."

"What does yer want?"

"Tell me whar that box are, and I'll let you and ther Injun go."

"No sab."

"You'll git hanged."

"I hain't able ter die more than onc't, even to please you, Nick Rawlings."

"You'd rather die than own up?"

"Yas, I would."

"Life's sweet."

"I has honor."

"What's honor to life?"

"Heaps."

"Well, up you go."

"I can't help it."

"You won't tell?"

"I done told yer."

The man threw his weight upon the rope and it drew the negro off of his feet.

He struggled violently and suffered greatly.

Then the brute let him down, and, after gasping for breath a moment Scraps revived.

"Waal, how does yer like hangin', yer black imp?" he sneered at him.

"I doesn't like it."

"I thought not; but I was jist playin' with yer thet time."

"Somebody'll be jist playin' with you, Nick Rawlings, some day, with a rope around your neck, and then you'll think of me," was the ominous reply.

The words struck him, for the man turned pale, for all bullies are afraid of a rope, and in committing crimes they trust to luck to escape the gallows.

"Waal, up yer goes ag'in, if yer won't tell."

"I won't."

"You'll die fu'st?"

"I'll die fu'st."

The malicious wretch looked at the negro a moment and there saw a determination in his face to die rather than yield.

So he said:

"I'll give yer another chance, Scraps."

"I don't ask none."

"Well, I'll be merciful to yer."

"Yer hain't got no more mercy than a Comanche, Nick Rawlings."

"Waal! what does yer say to sharin' with me of I lets you go, and lightin' out afore Sim gits back?"

"I says nothin'."

"You won't?"

"I won't."

"I is afeard yer hes ter die."

"So has you, and maybe it won't be long afore it, nuther, Mister Nick Rawlings."

Again the shot struck home, for the man paled, and with a muttered oath, threw the lariat end he held from over the limb of the tree, and then took the coil from about the neck of the negro.

"I was only tryin' ter skeer yer, Scraps."

"Waal, yer scared me considerable."

"Yer has grit."

"I has grit ter do what I knows am right, if I gits kilt for it."

"What'll yer do fer me ef I saves yer neck?"

"How saves me?"

"Ther boys will be here afore long."

"That's sure."

"And they'll hang you, unless I says no."

"They'll bang me anyhow."

"Net ef I says no."

"Yas dey will, for dey hain't gwine ter come 'way here for nothin'."

"Sim Lucas hab told 'em dere was to be a hangin' picnic, and dey wants ter see what dey comes for."

"I'll have 'em hang ther Injun."

"What hab he done?"

"Nothin'."

"That's what you is goin' to hang him for?"

"Yes."

"I is guilty ob de same; but you jist spare dat Injun, as dey hain't no reason for hangin' him and me too."

The cowboy was about to reply, when far off across the plain, he caught sight of several horsemen.

"The boys is comin'!" he cried.

"Oh, Lordy!" groaned Scraps, and he swept the prairie with his glance.

Then he beheld a party of four horsemen coming over a rise, and in another direction were three more.

"There's not enough of 'em fer a jury, but that don't mind—you'll hang, both of yer!" said Nick Rawlings, with a malicious smile, while Scraps, turning to the Indian, shook his head sadly and remarked:

"Red Wolf, I guesses we hab got to die."

"Die one time, no more," was the laconic reply of the Comanche.

"I wish I had never left old Alabama," murmured Scraps, and into his large dark eyes came tears as memory welled up from his heart of the olden time on the plantation.

CHAPTER XI.

A CLOSE CALL.

As they were in too dangerous a locality to dare to light a fire, Night Hawk and Broncho Bill hunted up the spring, watered their horses, and filling their canteens, rode out upon the prairie, where there was a hollow in the land, and camped.

The horses were staked out to short lariats, ready saddled, the girths being only loosened a little, and the bits taken out of their mouths.

Then the two scouts spread their blankets and sat down to eat a cold supper, consisting of some provisions which they had procured at the wagon-train from Lieutenant Dana, for their supplies had run down to jerked buffalo meat and cold water.

After their supper, which they enjoyed as such men will, who can rough it when need be, they went off on two separate scouts, each walking out for a distance of several hundred yards, and then walking in a circle around their camping-place until they met.

"I don't think there are any Indians around, George," said Broncho Bill when they met on the circle.

"Nor I; and the nature of the ground here is such that they cannot ride very near to our camp, so here's for a sleep," replied Night Hawk, and five minutes after they were wrapped in their blankets, fast asleep.

It was, perhaps, midnight, when Night Hawk suddenly rose to a sitting posture.

"Did you hear it, too, George?" asked Broncho Bill, in a whisper.

"Something waked me, but I do not know what."

"It was the cough of a horse, or of a buffalo, I don't know which, for I was only half-awake only."

"Then let us get to our horses and be ready."

Their blankets were quickly rolled up, and gliding to the side of their horses, which were still eating, the bits were slipped into the mouths of the animals, and both were made to lie down, by a motion of the hand rather than a word.

The well-trained horses dropped upon their

sides, lying flat down, and placing themselves at their heads, the scouts held their hands lightly upon their nostrils.

Then came a sound from off on the prairie.

It was a human voice.

Soon after was heard the *swish, swish* of horses going through long prairie grass, and the trained eyes of the scouts saw through the darkness the outlines of horses and riders.

They were coming almost toward them, and yet both Night Hawk and Broncho Bill knew that a wash in the prairie would cause them to round it, thus carrying them some two hundred feet away.

In silence they waited, half lying across the heads of their horses, to prevent their rising in fright, or neighing, and with their rifles ready to fire should some keen-eyed Indian detect them lying there.

That they were Indians the scouts knew at a glance.

They were riding in single file, and in silence, though one had spoken a moment before, doubtless pointing out the motte to his comrades.

"They are going to the motte to camp," whispered Broncho Bill.

"Yes, let us count them."

They had now come to the water wash, or divide, and after a short halt began to bear away to the left to round it.

There seemed a long string of them, and as they passed within two hundred feet of the scouts, each man was counted.

At last the column disappeared, winding on toward the timber, nearly half a mile away.

"I counted thirty-seven," said Broncho Bill.

"And I the same; but did not our horses behave well, Will?"

"Like little gentlemen," returned Broncho Bill.

Then, leaving their horses lying upon the prairie, the scouts hastened on up the rise and gazed after the retiring savages.

They were filing into the timber, and soon disappeared within its shadow.

"Going into camp," laconically said Night Hawk.

"Let us give them a hint that they had better move on."

"Fire upon them?"

"Yes."

"Well, if we throw a dozen shots each, in rapid succession into the timber, they will think we are a party of soldiers; but we must fire behind our blankets, so that they won't see the flashes."

Broncho Bill hastened back and got the horses up, ready to mount, and staked them close together.

Then the oldest blanket they had, one that had seen the hardest service, was carried back to the top of the rise and their horns, which the scouts always carried, were made to do duty by being stuck in the ground and the blanket made fast to them.

In the timbers now a light glimmered, and soon several fires flashed up.

"Those fellows are bold, for I hardly believed they would light a fire," Night Hawk said.

"They'll wish they hadn't," was Broncho Bill's response, and he took his stand behind the blanket.

The distance from where the scouts were to the timber was within range of their rifles, and they had that confidence in themselves that they could give the Indians a severe fight, mount their horses, ride down the slope and get away, if pursued.

"Ready, Will?" and Night Hawk crouched on the ground behind the blanket, the rifle muzzle close to it.

"Yes," and Broncho Bill took the same position.

"Fire!"

As the word left the lips of Night Hawk, the rifles began to rattle forth, and the bullets went pattering into the timber, for the scouts had so gauged their range and taken aim that they dropped lead right where they intended.

There was a wild chorus of yells, the neighing and snorting of frightened mustangs, and within half a minute of time over twenty bullets had fallen into the timber, some of them finding a target either in a warrior's body or a mustang's, though the distance was too great to do great damage.

After the yells had subsided there was heard the tramp of hoofs, and the scouts hastily re-loading, poured forth another rapid fire, after which they seized their bows and the blankets and ran back to their horses.

Springing into their saddles they rode to a position to command a view of the prairie, and placing his hands to his mouth, Broncho Bill

rolled out an exact imitation of a bugle sounding the rally.

The effect was electrical upon the savages, for, though they had hastily mounted their ponies, to prepare against an attack, they now felt that a large force of cavalry was upon them, as following the bugle-call of Broncho Bill came the trumpet tones of Night Hawk ordering troopers into line to charge.

Away through the timber tore the Comanches, out upon the prairie at full speed, expecting each moment to see a body of soldiers in full chase.

"Stampeded!" quietly said Night Hawk.

"Yes, we skeddaddled the entire outfit," and the two scouts laughed heartily over the funny affair, while, galloping off to another camping-place a mile away, they slept quietly for the balance of the night.

CHAPTER XII.

A MOCK TRIAL.

WITH a hurrah and a yell the cowboys, which had been seen coming across the prairie by Nick Rawlings and his two prisoners, dashed up to the door of the ranch, and were answered with a wild war-cry by the gaunt individual, who had so nearly choked the life out of poor Scraps.

Among the cowboys of the plains—come they from Montana, Colorado, or Texas—there are a great many noble specimens of manhood; but then there are a number who do duty as such, who are little better than horse-thieves and horseback tramps.

They stick to no work when they can steal, are ever ready for a fight, if they can make anything out of it and their evil deeds reflect upon the honorable men who are known as cowboys.

These whites are the "chaff" amidst the wheat, and law is doing much to root them out now by putting its heavy hand upon them where a few years ago they could terrorize a community.

Those cowboys whom Sim Lucas had brought to the "hanging bee," as he had called it, were certainly a bad lot.

They herded upon the "disputed ground," where they could dash into Mexico if need be, or run a drove of cattle across the river, which-ever would pay best.

They were under employ, and yet a wild, desperate set.

Sim Lucas had picked his men, seeming to know them well.

So when he rode up to the ranch, accompanied by six comrades, they were ready for any deed that might turn up.

To add to their recklessness, Nick Rawlings greeted them with an invitation to drink, bringing out for the occasion a bottle of fine old brandy that had belonged to the ranchero.

The liquor was dashed off, the ponies were staked out, and one huge fellow said:

"Now tell us what's up, Pard Nick, fer Sim only axed us to a hanging bee."

"Waal, pards, thar has been a foul murder committed," said Nick Rawlings, in a tone that was meant to seem distressed.

"A murder!" cried a number of voices.

"Yas."

"Whar's ther corpse?"

"Ther corpse are buried."

"Who were kilt?" asked the big bully, who appeared to take upon himself the duty of questioner, and which none of his comrades, for reasons best known to themselves, questioned his right to.

"Our boss were kilt, the handsome young feller as owns this ranch, and tuk me and Sim in as partners only last week."

"Who kilt him?"

"Waal, pards, I wants ter tell yer nigh as I kin git onder it."

"Yer see t'other day thar Injun come along here, and he and ther nigger held a powwow over yonder in ther woods."

"I sees 'em and I wondered what it were all about."

"Then ther Injun he lit out, and soon arter the boss, Pard Henry we call him, said he were goin' ter buy some more cattle."

"So off he rid, with ther nigger, leavin' his partners, Sim and me, ter keep house and look arter the critters."

"Waal, last night who comes back but ther nigger and ther Injun, and the black imp tells us the boss are dead, kilt by Injuns, and he will pay us our wages and we kin git."

"I was thet surprised, pards, I were choked; but axed ther nigger ter show me his papers, and he said his master hed a tin box in which were his instructions."

"Now, pard, ther boss tuk gold away from here with him, to spend it for cattle, and thet nigger know'd he war goin' and so told ther Comanche and they kilt him and got his money and then comed back here to bluff Sim and me."

"Thet's a fact, fer I hed a dream thet they kilt Pard Henry, and dreams is true signs, so my grandmother said, and she—"

"Durn yer old grandmammy! where's the gold?" cried the huge cowboy, breaking in somewhat rudely upon Sim's story of his grandmother.

"They hain't got a cent with 'em, in course, for they has hid it."

"But I leave it to you, pard, ef they hain't guilty o' murder in ther first degree?"

"It are a clean case ag'in' 'em," said the bully.

"It are a dead sure thing," another remarked.

"Hangin' is jist too good for 'em."

"Hangin' is ther game we plays with 'em."

"And we plays to win."

"Yas, our hands kin beat ther ace o' spades and the jack o' hearts ef they is trumps," and the cowboy who said this designated Scraps as the ace of spades, while Red Wolf came in as the jack of hearts.

"What does you make it?" asked Nick, of the huge bully, who was fond of the name he bore, which was that of Giant Saul.

"I makes it hangin', and I wishes a word with ther nigger, as I is ther jedge ter pass sentence," and Giant Saul turned to the brave negro, who had calmly watched every face and listened to every word as coolly as did his red-skin companion, for Scraps had made up his mind to die bravely, for that mercy would be shown him he did not for a moment believe.

He saw that the gold that his master had left was what Nick Rawlings and Sim Lucas were after, and he smiled grimly as he felt that he would have his revenge upon them by dying with the secret to go with him into the grave.

CHAPTER XIII.

UNINVITED GUESTS.

TURNING to Scraps in his bluff, rough manner, the self-appointed cowboy judge stepped up and looked fixedly into his face.

The negro did not flinch from the glaring eyes of the desperado.

"What's yer name?" he thundered.

"Scraps."

"Scraps o' what?"

"My name am Zekeel Tanner; but I've been called Scraps since I were a boy," and Scraps spoke with considerable respect in his tone.

"Whar on 'arth did yer git thet name?"

"My old master gib it to me, 'cause I ust ter run 'round de place pickin' up all de scraps and sich."

The bully laughed roughly and said:

"Scraps! What a name fer a tombstone!"

"Guess I won't hab no tombstone."

"Ye're right, for yer'll be in luck if yer gits a grave, for I'd leave yer ter ther cayotes ter pick!"

"You intends ter hang me?"

"That's jist what'll happen, nigger!"

"And ther Injun?"

"I'll hang him too."

"What for?"

"Murder."

"He hain't no more guilty than I am."

"I knows guilt when I sees it, and ef you two hain't got ther sin o' murder on your souls, then I'm a liar."

"Yer sees yer own soul reflected in our honest eyes," was the quick response of Scraps.

The bully seemed about to strike the bound man, as his comrades laughed at the remark; but, checking himself, he said:

"I won't kick a man as is on ther gallers."

"Waal, I'm ready to die, and I guess Red Wolf are, too. Hain't you?" and Scraps turned to the silent Indian, who complacently answered:

"Me live, me die, all same."

"Now just hear dat, and he b'long to no chuch nuther," said Scraps in great admiration of his red brother.

"Soon go to happy hunting-grounds," added Red Wolf.

"I hope I'll strike ther same trail; but maybe they won't want no coon in Injun heben, and now I t'inks of it, I'd rather not go thar, as dere is a Injun or two I don't want ter meet, seein' as I sent 'em thar," and Scraps seemed a trifle worried as to just which celestial destination his soul would embark for.

"Come, pards, stop foolin', and let's hang ther murderers," cried Nick Rawlings.

"Yas, up with 'em."

"Hang 'em!"

"Yonder's a good limb."

"It's ther boss fer a gallows!"

And so the cries arose on all sides, while Giant Saul and Nick Rawlings dragged the two prisoners toward the tree indicated as "a good gallows."

As they went along Nick Rawlings, who had hold of Scraps, said in a low tone:

"Tell me whar that box are and durned if I don't save yer from hangin'."

"Yer hain't got ther narve ter do it, if yer had ther heart. No sah, I dies silent!"

"Durn yer," growled Nick, and he struck the negro a blow in the face.

In spite of it the brave fellow laughed lightly.

He was devoid of all fear of his tormentors and intended murderers.

The party had now reached the tree, which was just under the shelter of the hill behind the cabin, and was the very tree in which the tin box was hidden.

Scraps's heart almost stood still, for if a man climbed the tree to put the rope over the limb, he would be likely to find the tin box in its hiding-place.

But Giant Saul skillfully threw the two ends of the rope over the limbs, and then placed the coils about the necks of Scraps and Red Wolf.

"Now, pards, git onto the ends of ther lariats, four on each, and when I says pull, up they goes!"

"Now, nigger, if yer knows any scraps o' prayers, shout away; and as fer you, Injun, prayers don't do heathen no good."

"All ready!"

A shout answered his words, and the command to pull was just about to issue from his lips when suddenly Night Hawk and Broncho Bill dashed upon the scene, as if by magic springing into their midst, and each hand held a revolver. Then rung out in deadly earnest the threatening words:

"Hands up, all of you!"

They were uninvited guests at the "hanging bee," but they were too well known on that border for the stern command of "hands up" not to be obeyed.

From the ropes they held, up went the hands of the eight men, for grouped together as they were, and with full self-cocking revolvers, such as the Powell brothers were known to carry, twenty-four bullets could be rained into that crowd before a weapon could be drawn.

"Waal, hands is up, now what?" queried Giant Saul, glancing first at Night Hawk and then at Broncho Bill, who sat their horses serenely, still covering the two groups with their revolvers.

CHAPTER XIV.

COWED.

"I'll tell you what is up, Giant Saul."

"You are about to commit a foul murder, for those two men are not guilty," came the calm, stern answer of Night Hawk to the huge desperado.

"It's a lie! they is guilty!" yelled Nick Rawlings.

A shot, a single one, followed his words, and as a howl of pain came from his lips, Broncho Bill coolly remarked:

"I've marked your ear, Nick Rawlings, to remind you that you called the wrong man a liar."

"Pards, has we got ter stand this?" whined Rawlings.

"Hands up all of you!"

"Move and we open fire, and you know our aim," and at Night Hawk's words the gang, which was becoming restless, became still as death.

Riding forward a few paces, Broncho Bill lowered one revolver, took his knife from his belt and quickly severed the bonds of Scraps.

Dropping the knife he said:

"Pick it up and free the Comanche."

Scraps did not take an instant in obeying.

"Now disarm those men, both of you."

"Yer's cowards to take advantage 'cause yer kin," growled Giant Saul.

Broncho Bill laughed in his light way, and Night Hawk said:

"We came here two to eight, but we are four now against you, and if you wish to fight it out we are willing."

"Get your guns, pards, and let those men have theirs again."

"Yer knows ef we kills yer we'll hev ther whole fort down on us," said Giant Saul.

"That's the way you sneak out of it; but if you call us cowards again I'll mark your ear as

Will has Nick Rawlings's, to keep civil tongues in your heads."

There was no mistaking that Night Hawk and Broncho Bill were in earnest, and the band of bullies were cowed completely.

As the Indian and Scraps had now disarmed them, Night Hawk said, addressing the negro:

"Now, my man, what is the trouble between you two and this gang of despera oes?"

"You calls names now," cried Giant Saul.

"If you don't like what I say to you, take your revolver, step off ten paces and resent it," and Night Hawk leaped from his horse, grasped a weapon, which Scraps said belonged to the giant and held it out to him, while Broncho Bill kept his weapons still covering the group and the Indian and the negro also stood ready for deadly work, if called upon.

"I hain't a-goin' ter fight again' dead sure odds."

"What odds?"

"Ther whole fort."

"You hedge on the fort as an excuse for your cowardice."

"But we wish to hear the report of these two men as to why you want to hang them."

"Now, my man, tell us what it was all about?" and Night Hawk turned to Scraps.

As for Scraps his whole form was trembling with delight.

He had looked death squarely in the face without a quiver of fear visible; but being snatched from the very grave, as it were, almost unnerved him.

"I done tell yer all about it, boss, and you, sah," and he bowed to Broncho Bill, while he spoke to Night Hawk.

"Well, my man, take it coolly and let us know."

"Yes, sah, gemmans, me and my poor boss, Mars' Henry, we rid out for a hunt fer several days."

"This are his ranch, yer see, and two o' these men was his cowboys, sah."

"Waal, sah, we got chased by Injuns, and we had a hard run of it and I guess we'd hev been cotched if some sojers hadn't come in sight an' run de Comanches back."

"But poor Mars' Henry he were wounded with an Injun arrer in his back, and I tuk him on to some timber and tried ter help him, but he says to me he know'd as how he were gwine ter die."

"But, I went off wid de canteens, to git some water, leavin' Mars' Henry lyin' on de ground, and de hosses near him, when some Injuns jumped me in de timber and chase me far off."

"I is mighty spry on my feet, if I does wear number 'levens, and I made de dirt fly too fast for dem Injuns, and I got inter a little cabin house dat I see'd in de woods."

"I stayed dere all night, and next day de Injuns had gone and I went back to whar I left Mars' Henry."

"Oh, gemmans, he war dead and tored to pieces by de wolves, for de Injuns had taken de horses and left him lying dere, arter robbin' him, I s'pose, 'cause I didn't see no clo'es 'round."

"Waal, I buried what dere was ob de body, and den I started on foot fer home, and mighty tuckered out and hungry I kin tole yer."

"Den I seen three horsemen coming, and one was dis Injun gemman, who I know'd, and t'others was some o' de Cowboy Pirit band."

"Dey had jist captured Red Wolf, and dey was gwine ter burn him up, for I were hidin' an' I done heerd dem say so."

"So I jist opened fire on 'em, and I kilt de half-breed man, and t'other, a Mexikin, jump on his pony powerful quick and got away, for I wasn't anxious ter foller him, seein' as I had got de Comanche all right."

"I untied Red Wolf, and den I tuk de horse o' de half-breed and we come home."

"I hab my orders from poor Mars' Henry afore he die, and I axed de Comanche to lib wid me here, and so he got his outfit and comed home wid me."

"Den I tole Mister Rawlings my story, and at night he and Sim Lucas dere, his pard, come at Red Wolf and me and hab us dead sure."

"So dey make us pris'ners, and den Sim he go arter de cowboys to come and help hang us, for dey pretend to say we kill poor Mars' Henry and dat he owe dem money, and dey tale de ranch and cattle."

"But he only owe 'em for dis month, as I knows, and Nick and Sim, dem bad men, want to git Mars' Henry's tin box, which are hid away and hab money and papers in it, and 'cause I won't tell 'em whar it am, dat is why dey say I kill him."

"Dat is my story, gemmans, and I crosses my heart it am Gospil truth."

"We know that it is the truth, my man, for we can read signs pretty well, and we have followed every step of your trail."

"We saw your master's grave, and the traces showed us that he had been torn to pieces."

"We followed your track to the spring in the timber, then your running trail to the old cabin, a mile away, and could see the Indian trails, too."

"The track of the two Cowboy Pirates across the prairie with your Indian friend, the body of the half-breed, half-devoured by wolves, and then the trail of yourself and the Comanche to his cabin, and then here we followed without a miss."

"We were watching, from the hill yonder, the high-handed behavior of this gang of murderers, for, from those I see here that I know of, they are little better than horse-thieves and cut-throats, and we chipped in to save you, and I am only sorry they did not have the nerve to draw their guns, that we might rid the country of some of them."

"It is not too late now, if they feel an anxiety to fight," coolly said Broncho Bill.

"Dey looks more anxious to git away den dey does ter fight," Scraps remarked, with a laugh.

"Well, they can go, and the two cowboys who were employed by your master can go with them."

"Have you the money to pay them?"

"Yas, sah, I has it right wid me, for Mars' Henry allus told me ter carry a hundred dollars along, for fear o' accidents, and he owed 'em jist thirty dollars apiece at the end of dis month."

Scraps took from an inner pocket a roll of bills, as he spoke, and counted out the amount and handed it to Rawlings and Lucas.

"Now get their traps, my man, and their horses."

This was quickly done by the negro, and then, covering the gang with their rifles, Night Hawk said:

"Will, empty their guns, please, and then let them have them."

Instantly the weapons of the cowboys began to rattle lively in the hands of the handsome scout, and when the last shot had been fired, he called out:

"Now mount and get!"

"You'll rue this work, pards," cried Giant Saul.

"Let that remind you to keep your word," and quick as lightning Night Hawk's weapon flashed, and, as Broncho Bill had done, he clipped the ear of the desperado.

It was enough, for the band sprang upon their ponies and dashed away, glad to get out of range, while Scraps, in his admiration, cried out:

"Oh, gemmans! if my poor Mars' Henry had only know'd yer, he'd never hab wanted ter die."

CHAPTER XV.

PARDS.

THE eight cowboys rode off like the wind, until they got out of range of the deadly rifles of the two scouts.

Then they halted, and grouped together, were evidently discussing the situation.

Both Night Hawk and Broncho Bill had fully realized the desperate risk they had run in bearding the reckless cowboys.

But they had carefully followed the trails, as Night Hawk had said, and upon coming in sight of the cabin had taken in the situation at a glance.

With their horses beyond the hill, and within hearing distance, they had overheard what was said and had decided to act and to dare everything to save the Indian and the negro from being murdered, for, recognizing a number of the men, they felt assured that there was some motive for their actions, deeper than the mere hanging of Red Wolf and Scraps.

So they consulted together and, taking their own lives in their hands, had boldly dashed upon the scene and at once became masters of the situation.

The crack shot of Broncho Billy, in clipping the ear of Nick Rawlings, had been to cow them, as he saw they were restless and ready to break out at a single word of encouragement, while Night Hawk had shot with something of the same motive and left his mark for life upon the huge bully.

They saw the cowboys halt out upon the prairie and load their weapons, while they dis-

cussed the situation, evidently in no pleasant tones.

But, with the cabin as a citadel and Red Wolf and Scraps as allies, neither Night Hawk or Broncho Bill had any dread of the result of an attack from them, though they were two to one.

For a few moments it seemed as though the cowboys were really meditating an attack upon the ranch, for they were seen to be handling their weapons as though getting ready.

Then they turned their attention to the cattle, and Scraps called out:

"Lordy! dey is gwine ter run off with ther cattle."

"Come, we must show a bold face to those fellows."

"Mount, and follow me," and Night Hawk at once sprang upon his horse, and Broncho Bill and the others followed his example.

"Spread out in a line and keep steady."

"Will, you take the left, and I will hold the right, while Scraps and Red Wolf have the center."

So saying, Night Hawk moved forward, the four starting out in a line of a hundred yards in length.

The cowboys had in the mean time been surrounding the cattle, evidently having decided to drive them off.

But the bold front shown by the two scouts, in daring to come out and attack them, seemed to check their plans, while one or two urged that they were driving off property that did not belong to them, and soldiers would be sent against them.

But this was a subterfuge to escape a battle with the four men, though they were two to one against them.

Scraps's skill as a rifle and pistol-shot was well-known to both Rawlings and Lucas, and Red Wolf was supposed to be a bad hand in a fight, and especially against them would both men be more than anxious to do their best for revenge.

Then the two Buckskin Brothers, as the Powells were often called, were men to dread.

Their record was too well known for them not to be feared.

They had drifted to the plains as rancheros on a small scale, and though keeping a small ranch, they were also doing duty as Government scouts, when their services were sought.

Several times they had been forced to show their deadly marksmanship, and peaceable at all times, when aroused they were men who went to the bitter end.

These were the considerations which the cowboys felt urged them against a battle with the Buckskin Brothers and their negro and Indian allies.

After a short consultation, as that line of four men came slowly but surely on, they gave a few defiant yells and started off at a gallop.

The cattle were then driven into the stockade, along with the herd of mustangs, and Scraps set about getting one of his splendid suppers which his young master had always been so fond of.

There was a fireplace outside of the cabin, under a shed, and here a table was set and Scraps was anxious to do himself more than justice in his culinary efforts, and he certainly did, for the brothers were glad to confess that they never had enjoyed a better meal.

That night Scraps got the box from its hiding-place, and Night Hawk at his request wrote a note to the one to whom the package of letters was addressed, and made up all in a package, with the miniature and a few other little trinkets.

The miniature was set in gold and was of a beautiful young girl, with a face that was most fascinating, and long the two scouts gazed upon its loveliness.

"Yer see, sah," explained Scraps.

"Mars' Henry were from Alabama, whar he lived on the plantation wid his parents."

"I were also born dere, gemmens, and it were a lovely home."

"But Mars' Henry he went inter ther army, and while he were at West Point he see'd dis young leddy and fell in lub wid her."

"While he were on ther frontier somewhar, I guesses around the North country, his parents die o' yellow feber in Mobile, and soon arter de leddy as Mars' Henry lub she git married to somebody else."

"Gemmens, from dat day he were de saddest man I ever seen."

"He comed out to Alabama, sold de ole home, and den he struck out fer Texas, whar I sjudgest he sh'd come."

"Yer sees I were wrong, for he am dead; but

he axed me to send dem things right to de leddy, and I axes yer to do so, as yer says yer kin send 'em from de fort."

"I wil see that they go straight, Scraps, and will give you the receipt for their delivery."

"But this paper leaves Zekiel Tanner the ranch, effects and money in hand, and it is drawn in Galveston and witnessed there."

"That's me, sah—I are Zekiel Tanner, called Zeke fer short, and whom ole massa christened Scraps."

"Yes, I see it says 'Zekiel Tanner, nicknamed Scraps.'"

"Yes, sah, dat's me."

"Well, you had better hide the box away again, with your money and these other papers, and I would not suggest putting it again in the tree, as it might be struck by lightning, blown down or burned."

"Dat's so, sah, and I knows another place I'll put it, and you gemmans can know, so if anything happens ter me, you will know whar der papers is."

This matter having been settled, the party retired, neither Night Hawk or Broncho Bill considering it worth while to keep a watch, as they feared no trouble from the cowboys.

After a couple of days' rest at the ranch, enjoying the good cooking of Scraps, the Buckskin Brothers took their departure for the post, leaving Scraps in possession of his house, and Red Wolf for his companion, for the negro and the Indian had become inseparable pards, the former doing all the talking for the two, as the latter was always taciturn, seldom even speaking; but that the Comanche became greatly attached to the one who had saved his life, there was no manner of doubt.

CHAPTER XVI.

WELL MET.

WHEN the Buckskin Brothers returned to the fort, they had a warm welcome, and they were glad to see that Lieutenant Dana was considered quite a hero after his victory over the Comanches.

They also came in for their share of praise, for Frank Dana was not one to wear another's laurels without giving full credit where it was deserved.

All were anxious to know what the two scouts had discovered on their long trail, and they reported to the major in command the death of the young ranchero, and the scene that had taken place at the ranch between them and the cowboys.

"I half believe that some of these cowboys nearest the river are mixed up with this band of outlaws known as the Cowboy Pirates of the Rio Grande, colonel," said Night Hawk.

"Well, if you can find out that such is the case, Powell, I will make short work of them, on any proof which you or your brother may bring," was the answer of Major Loring.

Then he added:

"The outlawry on this border is something fearful, and it is mostly owing to the fact that Mexico affords a hiding-place for all scamps who fly from justice on this side, and Mexican outlaws run over on Texan soil to escape punishment from their Government."

"Then there are the Comanches to contend against, and altogether, it is a knot the unraveling of which will require time and much stretching of hemp."

"But you go ahead in your good work, for you are of most assistance to me, and before long the good points of your service will begin to show."

This gave the Buckskin Brothers a kind of roving privilege, and they were more than willing to be on the watch while attending to the duties devolving upon them at their little ranch, which, as their mother was there with them, they had settled as far from the danger line as possible.

Mrs. Powell, the mother of Night Hawk and Broncho Bill, was a woman perfectly fearless, and she could handle a rifle and revolver with deadly aim, if need be.

Their home was as comfortable a one as was on the border, and their drove of mustangs and herd of cattle were increasing in numbers rapidly and consequently in value.

With a couple of old and faithful servants, Mrs. Powell remained at the ranch, proud of her gallant sons, and ever anxious to make their stay at home pleasant, and with the greatest delight she was wont to look forward to their coming from their perilous trips.

Two cowboys that were thoroughly to be trusted, had charge of the ranch and so the brothers found time to go at will on any expedi-

tion that might suggest itself, or that they might be needed upon.

Having sent the package, intrusted to their keeping by Scraps, to the address given, Night Hawk and Broncho Bill set out upon a visit to their home.

After a stay there of a couple of weeks, they again took the trail, and, a couple of months after leaving the fort they were back again with much valuable information which they had picked up, and which was of much service to Major Lionel.

The receipt for the package, safely delivered, was returned, and so Night Hawk suggested a visit to Ranchero's Rest, to deliver it to Scraps about whom they felt some little anxiety.

Broncho Bill was more than willing, and telling the major they would do more scouting work, they set out for the ranch.

After nine days' ride, having often turned from their trail to look at "Indian signs," they camped one night some ten miles from Ranchero's Rest, intending to make an early start the next morning and arrive in time for one of Scraps's good breakfasts.

They awoke before dawn and instantly Broncho Bill called out:

"What's that red glare, George?"

"I don't know; it must be a prairie fire," was the answer.

"It is right in the direction of the Ranchero's Rest."

"You are right, so let us get at once on the way."

The blankets were rolled up, horses saddled, and mounting, they set off at a canter.

As they ascended a rise of the prairie, they saw that the horizon to the south was one vast glare of red.

"Will?"

"Yes, George."

"I believe they have done it at last."

"Those cowboys?"

"Yes; Rawlings and his gang."

"I guess you are right; but I hope no harm has befallen poor Scraps and the Comanche."

"I trust not; but if those villains set the cabin on fire, you may be sure that it was with the negro and the Indian in it."

After riding swiftly along for some distance, Broncho Bill said, sharply:

"George?"

"Yes."

"We must rid the country of that gang, for, with the major, I believe that the Cowboy Pirates are not altogether men belonging to the band of that Mexican, San Cruz."

"Such is my idea, and I am ready for the work at any time, Will," was the quiet response, and Nighthawk Powell meant just what he said.

It was now daybreak, and as the Buckskin Brothers dashed across the prairie, suddenly appeared before them two men.

They were on foot, and running at full speed. At a glance they were recognized, for Broncho Bill called out:

"Scraps and Red Wolf, for all I am worth!"

"Correct! and they are pursued," was the response of Nighthawk, and the horses were put to a run to meet the two men, so well met, for a moment after a party of horsemen dashed from the timber behind the fugitives, and in full pursuit.

CHAPTER XVII.

A MIDNIGHT RAID.

WHEN seen by Nighthawk and Broncho Bill, both Scraps and Red Wolf were doing their level best at making time.

The sight of the two horsemen had at first caused them to halt, for their eyes were blurred from their running so fast, and they did not recognize them.

But when Red Wolf said:

"Night Hawk and Broncho Bill," it was the signal for one of Scraps's old-fashioned plantation yells, and he gave it with a vengeance, while Red Wolf shouted back at his pursuers a cry of defiance.

The two scouts echoed the shouts with their own ringing war-cries, and spurred to the rescue, their rifles ready.

There were four men in pursuit, and they came swiftly on, until some one happened to recognize the scouts, and shouted:

"Hold, pards! it is ther Buckskin Brothers!"

Instantly the four drew rein, and, as the scouts came swiftly on they turned and retreated to the shelter of the timber which they had just left.

Then they halted, and while one led their horses back out of sight they took up positions to make a stand and fight, it seemed.

Upon reaching the two fugitives, Night Hawk and Broncho Bill were greeted with warm expressions of gratitude from Scraps, while Red Wolf said:

"Much heap good brother."

"Big white chiefs."

"What is the trouble, Scraps?" asked Night Hawk.

"Burned out, boss."

"They have burned your cabin?"

"Yas, sah, all gone," panted the negro.

"Who did it?"

"Don't know 'zactly, sah, for dey wored cloth over their faces for masks; but dere was two as cu'dn't mask their shape."

"Nick Rawlings and Giant Saul?"

"Yas, sah, dem's de ones, or dere is two like 'em in shape."

"I guess you are not far wrong, Scraps."

"But how many are there in the gang?"

"I counted nine, sah."

"Well, tell us about it, now you have got your breath, and we will then go back with you, and if these men bar our way they must fight, though we wish no trouble with them unless they provoke it."

"They going to fight, sah, for dey is dere in de woods, and dere is three more of 'em back yonder."

"I thought you said there were nine?"

"Dere was nine, sah."

"Ah!"

"Two are missing?" asked Broncho Bill with a smile.

"Yas, sah, two is gwine ter keep missin', too."

"Tell us about it."

"Waal, gemmens, matters has been regulatin' along all right up to past few days, when me and Red Wolf seen trails around we didn't like."

"Dere was tracks about de cabin, made wid boot-heels, and around de corral, and so we concluded we was gwine ter git into trouble."

"So I took some belongings I didn't want hurt out inter ther woods, whar I has a hidin'-place, and den me and Wolf begin to watch o' nights."

"It were lucky for us that we begannd that very night, which were last night, for about midnight, while I were sleepin', and the chief were watchin', he waked me up and say:

"Look dar!"

"I looked, and I seen things wasn't right, fer thar was half a dozen men about the stockade."

"They was too many for us, so we didn't do nothin' but lie still, as thar was none of 'em we thought about ther cabin."

"Pretty soon ther stockade gates was open, and ther stock all was druv out onto ther perarer."

"I were mad, but I didn't say nothin', and of course Red Wolf he kept quiet, for he always do."

"Soon arter ther stock were druv off, I heerd a loud knock at the cabin door, and a voice call out:

"Hain't you red and black niggers gwine ter git up?"

"Of course there was no reply, and the knocking and calling were kept up, until they begun to pound at ther door very heavy."

"They seen our saddles, for we should have tuck them and our horses with us, and they thought sure we was in ther cabin."

"Burn 'em out," then we heard one say, and all of 'em yelled."

"Soon they had a fire, and they piled things up ag'in' ther door, and I know'd ther cabin were a goner."

"Ther fire burned slow at first; but it soon got quick, and then says I ter the chief:

"We is ruined, Wolf."

"He say back to me:

"Much heap revenge; have good time kill bad pale-face."

Both Night Hawk and Broncho Bill burst out laughing at this, and the former said:

"But go on with your story, Scraps."

"Yes, sah; but dere hain't much more to tell, for when de cabin burn hot, and we didn't come out, they call out we was hidin' somewhar round, and to look us up."

"Den we concluded to git, and we was gittin' right along pretty peert, when three of 'em spy us, and came a-running arter us."

"Both Wolf an' me shot at 'em, an' two of 'em tumbled from their horses, and t'other run back for more help."

"Then yonder four come, and if we hadn't met you dey would have kilt us sart'in, for we didn't fetch no ammunition by mistake."

"Yes, it is a sad mistake, Scraps, and one you must never make."

"Get your ammunition first, and then you'll not forget your rifle or revolvers."

"You made another mistake in not having your horses with you, or near you, in hiding," Broncho Bill added.

"Yas sah; but I is l'arning rapid, and if they don't kill me I'll git eddicated in time; but lordy, how glad I is to be yer', gemmans."

"But does yer intend ter fight dem varmint in de woods?"

"There are no men there, Scraps," said Broncho Bill.

"Yas sah, for didn't yer seen 'em?"

"Yes, we saw them make a show of stopping there to fight."

"Dey is dere, sah."

"No, for they sent their horses back with one of their men, while they took positions behind trees, pretending they meant to remain."

"Then they crept away and are a long way off by now."

"Lordy! you gemmans reads folks' doings same as a book," said Scraps with admiration in voice and look, while Red Wolf remarked in his terse way:

"Yes, big chiefs."

"Well, we will go on and see if we cannot find you a mount, and you follow on as rapidly as possible," and the two scouts rode straight on toward the timber where they had seen the horsemen prepare for resistance against them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT THE RUINED RANCH.

It proved to be just as Broncho Bill had surmised, that the horsemen had only made a show at a stand in the timber, and had then crept off, mounted their horses and fled at full speed.

Whoever they happened to be they were anxious to hasten back, remove the bodies of their two men, slain by the Comanche and Scraps, so that dead men should tell no tales, and then urge their companions to hasten on with the stock, as there were upon their track two scouts who might have at their back a large force of soldiers.

So the four men fled in hot haste, and reaching the bodies of their comrades took them across their horses and pressed on after those who were driving off the stolen stock.

Not willing to leave the chief and Scraps too far behind, the scouts went at a slow pace for them, when on a trail, and yet they read the signs that they saw with unerring truth.

They saw where the two men had fallen from their horses, under the fire of the Indian and negro, and where the one man who had escaped of the three in pursuit had turned back to get others to go in chase.

The tracks of the four returning, when they had dismounted and picked up the bodies, or wounded men, whichever they might see, were gone over patiently and unerringly.

"George?"

"Yes."

"When those two men fell from their horses the animals went off this way, see!" and Broncho Bill pointed to two trails.

"You are right."

"There are no other trails following, so the horses were doubtless not caught."

"By Jove! the very thing, for we can mount Scraps and Red Wolf at once," cried Night Hawk.

"You wait here for them to come up, and I'll follow the trails of the two horses, for they cannot have gone far."

So Broncho Bill rode off at a canter, readily following the trails, which kept well together.

After about half a mile's ride he came in sight of the horses, feeding in a bottom.

They were saddled and bridled, and the rein of one had caught his feet and hobbled him.

The other animal started to run, having not recovered from his fright of having his master shot from his back, which always alarms a horse greatly, and Broncho Bill at once went in chase.

Loosing his lariat he soon had it in hand, and as his splendid horse carried him within lasso range of the flying animal, he launched the noose through the air.

At once his skill was shown, for the animal was securely caught, and seeming to know that to go on would give him a hard fall, he nicely stopped short.

The other horse was then vainly captured and freed from the tangled reins.

Then Broncho Billy started back at a gallop with his prizes, for the animals wore handsome saddles and bridles. The rifles and traps of their riders were also strapped to the saddles, and Broncho Bill congratulated himself upon his capture.

Scraps and Red Wolf had caught up when he returned, and were following close behind Night Hawk when he overtook them.

"That was good work of yours, Will, for now we are fixed, and with a pair of extra rifles and ammunition in the bargain," said Night Hawk.

The Indian and negro at once mounted the horses, and seemed greatly pleased with their mounts and the outfit they had secured.

As they came near the ranch, Broncho Bill scouted in ahead, but his call soon told the others to come on, as there were no foes there.

The wicked work of the raiders was well done, however, for the cabin was in ashes and the stockade was slowly burning away.

This was quickly stopped, however, by removing a few of the timbers, and then Scraps sought the place where he had certain things cached in a secure hiding-place, and the result was a very fine breakfast was soon ready.

Not a mustang or a steer had been left behind by the raiders, and they had ruined all that they could destroy before leaving, and Scraps's eyes filled with tears as he looked at the ruined home.

"Gemmans, does yer know what I has done?" he asked the scouts.

"What is it, Scraps?"

"Waal yer know I is somethin' of a carpenter in my line, and I jist made a fu'st rate coffin, and then tuk a shovel and spade, two mustangs and de ambulance, which Mars' Henry brought here wid him, and which dem devils has burnt up, and while Red Wolf tuk keer of de ranch I scooted off up to whar de grave were."

"The ranchero's?"

"Yas, sah."

"And you dug up the body?"

"Yas, sah, what dere was left ob it, and I fetched it here, and ef yer'll come wid me I'll show yer."

They followed the noble negro in silence, and at a pretty spot, on the banks of the stream, they beheld a grave.

It was neatly rounded, and upon it wild flowers had been planted, and so faithfully had they been cared for that they were blooming brightly.

At the head of the grave was a wooden cross, and into it had been cut with real artistic skill in lettering:

"POOR MARS' HENRY."

It was a simple tribute from the faithful negro, and he said:

"Mars' Henry ust ter like ter come here, gemmans, and he lie right whar dat grave am, and read by de hour."

"So I fetched him here, where his grave wouldn't be so lonesome near to me."

The scouts did not speak, and Broncho Bill grasped Scraps's hand in silence, and walked quickly away, while tears dimmed the eagle eyes of Night Hawk, as he dropped his hand upon the negro's shoulder and said:

"Scraps, in the language of the Bible I can say to you:

"Well done thou good and faithful servant."

Then Night Hawk said that they must be upon the trail of the raiders, and walked away.

But glancing back, as he was some distance off, he saw Scraps on his knees by the grave, his head uncovered and his face upraised as though in prayer.

A more touching sight he had never witnessed.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE TELL-TALE GRAVES.

AFTER a rest of several hours at the ruined ranch, the scouts, the Indian and Scraps, mounted their horses and set off upon the broad trail left by the cattle-thieves.

They knew that the herd had fully ten hours' start of them, and would be driven hard, while it being the first day's drive the cattle would be fresh and be able to make a long march.

That they could retake the herd the scouts did not believe, for they felt assured that if nine men had come to the ranch, others were doubtless near as a reserve, or support, for the cowboys, if they were the gang which had tried to hang the Comanche and Scraps, certainly had allies.

They gave Scraps no hope of recapturing his stock, but Night Hawk said:

"We will, I think, Scraps, be able to trace out who the thieves are."

"Yas, sah."

"And if we do, I think we can make this country a little too hot for Nick Rawlings, Giant Saul and those of his class."

"It's bound ter be hot for 'em, sah, arter you and Mister Broncho Bill takes hold of 'em,"

responded Scraps, and Red Wolf gave a grunt of ready assent.

The two captured horses proved to be excellent ones, and as the scouts rode animals that had not their superior on the border, for speed and staying qualities, and in fact few equals, the four pressed on at a good pace.

After going some miles and watching the trail closely, Broncho Bill called a halt and looked at his brother.

"I see what you mean, Will," said Night Hawk with a smile.

"You see this small trail going off here?"

"Yes."

"Two horses and about half-a-dozen cattle?"

"Yes, it looks as though the cattle had made a break here, and then had gotten off into the woods."

"So it looks; but was it so?"

"That was what I was thinking, Will, for there may have been a reason for these cattle to break off here."

"There was a reason; but we can go on and watch to see where the trail rejoins the main one."

This they did, and it was about half a mile beyond.

Without a word Night Hawk and Broncho Bill turned back on the small trail, and the two others followed, Scraps wondering what discovery the scouts had made that seemed to interest them so.

For his part he only saw the tracks of a few cattle and two horses, which had broken from the trail, and after a short run had been brought back again.

But the scouts saw more in it, or thought they did.

A ride of a quarter of a mile brought them into some timber, and straight toward a thicket the scouts led the way.

"There it is, Will," quietly said Night Hawk, pointing to a spot loosely covered with leaves.

"Yes, and we will see who they are."

"Come, let us dig down into this grave, for it isn't deep," and Broncho Bill sprung from his horse.

The others followed his example, the leaves were thrown aside, and with knife and sticks the soft dirt was removed.

The grave was perfectly flat, the loose dirt having evidently been carried off in bags, or cloths, to drop in some stream.

But for the superior knowledge of the Buckskin Brothers, the bodies of the two men lying within would not have been found.

They were soon exposed, and had been thrown into the shallow hole without a blanket around them.

"You and Wolf aimed well, Scraps," said Night Hawk, pointing to the bullet wounds in the heads of the men.

The dirt was brushed from the faces, and then Broncho Bill said quietly:

"They are two of your friends, Scraps."

"Yas, sah, I knows them."

"Same bad pale-face," said Red Wolf recognizing two of the party of eight who had so nearly put an end to the life of Scraps and himself.

"Let us fill in the grave and then push on."

"We cannot catch the herd, but we may meet some of the men coming back."

"If not, we know who six of the party are, and the ninth we must find out, for two are accounted for," Night Hawk said.

The grave was then made as it was before, and the four horsemen pushed on once more after the stolen herd and the band of robbers.

CHAPTER XX.

GIVEN WARNING.

WHEN the party reached the Rio Grande, the herd of stolen cattle and mustangs had already been run across the river into Mexican territory.

They halted long enough to discover if any of the robbers had then turned back, but they were not able to find any, and so they passed on down the river, Night Hawk remarking that the cowboys would be anxious to return to the ranches where they belonged and would naturally cross the river with the herd and records at another ford, so as to throw all pursuit off the track.

Before leaving the ranch the two scouts and the Indian had closely studied the tracks of the animals ridden by the cowboys, as they had been riding about the cabin, and all along on the trail they had picked out the same hoof-marks.

After riding down the Rio Grande to another crossing, they there found tracks which a close study revealed were the same that had been at the ranch and on the cattle-trail.

Red Wolf was here in his element, and he

pronounced the tracks of five of the horses made by the same animals which they had trailed.

They had, in following the track of the cattle, seen other marks that indicated the nine men who had been at the ranch were not all of the party, for the mustangs that were stolen were unshod, and there had been half a dozen animals wearing shoes.

Taking the trails of the four horses that had recrossed the river, and which were as familiar to their practiced eyes as the hoof-marks of their own animals, they set off upon the back trail.

At a certain point one separated and Scraps said:

"It goes to ther ranch of Mister Binney."

"How many cowboys has he, Scraps?"

"Five, sah."

"We will just call upon Mr. Binney," said Night Hawk, and a ride of six miles brought them to the Binney Ranch.

The trail led directly to it, and as they rode up Binney and his five cowboys were just sitting down to dinner in the kitchen cabin.

The scouts knew Ranchman Binney, and so Night Hawk called out:

"Ho, Mr. Binney, have you lost any stock lately?"

"No, Mr. Powell; but won't you come in and have some dinner?"

"One moment, please," and Night Hawk asked in a low tone:

"Any of your cowboys been off the past few days?"

"Yes, Rufus Davis has been over to see his brother."

"Ah, yes, I see Rufus in there now," and as though going to take dinner, Night Hawk dismounted.

The cowboy who answered to the name of Rufus Davis was a short, stout fellow, with a face that would not bear close inspection, if one was looking in it for any noble traits.

He was pale as the scouts entered, for he had seen them ride up, but he did not suppose that they had tracked him so surely.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," said Night Hawk, pleasantly, and he took his hat off as he entered the cabin, but it covered the act of his drawing a revolver, and he had the man covered in an instant, while he said, sternly:

"Davis, you are my prisoner!"

Broncho Bill, the negro, and the Indian stood ready to "hold the fort," should others interfere.

But having covered his man, Night Hawk stopped up to him and in a moment had disarmed him.

"Mr. Binney, I am sorry, sir, to tell you that you have a black sheep among your flock, for this man deserves hanging."

"We will take him with us, for there are some of his comrades that we wish him to meet."

"What has he been doing, Night Hawk?" asked one of the other four cowboys present.

"Cattle-stealing."

"If we'd 'a' know'd that we'd 'a' hanged him; but I hopes you can prove it."

"Oh, yes, I do not act hastily."

"I wrong no man without proof."

"See here!" and Night Hawk drew a red handkerchief from the pocket of the prisoner and said:

"Do you see these holes cut in here?"

"Well, he wore this as a mask in some devilish work he has been doing."

"Mr. Binney, pardon our unpleasant interruption, but this man goes with us."

"I have nothing to say, Powell, for I know you act under Government orders, and if Davis is guilty let him suffer," was the reply of the ranchero.

Binding their prisoner quickly, the party made him mount his own horse, which one of the cowboys brought around saddled and ready, and then all rode away.

Back to the trail they went, and taking it up once more, they pressed on until another track branched off to another ranch.

Here another of the four was surprised and captured, and the honest cowboy comrades he had deceived were very willing to see him punished.

It was night when the party with their prisoners approached the ranch where the trail of the two last led.

It was where Sim Lucas and Nick Rawlings had obtained employment as herders, after leaving Ranchero's Rest.

They were also surprised by having revolvers covering them before they could resist, and their employer was told of their treacherous work.

"Now, Nick Rawlings, where is Giant Saul?" asked Broncho Bill.

"I dunno," was the sullen reply.

"Well, I could force you to know, if I took harsh measures; but I think he will take warning when he knows that you have left the country."

"Does yer mean for us ter leave that way?" and Nick Rawlings pointed toward the ground.

"It is the way that you should leave, after being guilty of the crimes you have."

"But we are going to be merciful," and then the scouts turned on toward the Ranchero's Rest, while Red Wolf and Scraps were told to go to the two nearest ranches and ask the people to come to the ruin the next morning.

It was late that night when Red Wolf and Scraps returned, and their report was that the rancheros and their cowboys would be on hand at the time appointed.

That night the cowboys rested uneasily, for they felt assured that the gathering the next morning would be to hang them.

In their coward hearts they feared death, and their wicked lives came before them to smite their conscience with the full of their iniquity.

The party camped at the river, and the next morning rose up bright and early, and Scraps soon had a good breakfast prepared, which was also given to the prisoners.

But they had lost their appetites, and they turned livid with fear when they beheld a party of horsemen advancing at a gallop toward the timber.

It was a ranchero and half a dozen of his men.

Soon after another ranchero and two cowboys arrived, and Night Hawk at once said:

"Gentlemen, I have here four men who disgrace the name of cowboy."

"They were guilty of intended murder, and they came here to avenge themselves upon this colored man and his Indian friend, because my brother and myself would not let them hang them for a crime which Scraps and Red Wolf had never committed."

"You see this ruin?"

"Well, they were with a party that came here a few nights ago and this is the result, while the cattle were run off from the ranch and driven across the border."

"Hang 'em!" shouted a voice.

"String 'em up!"

"Up with 'em!"

Such were the cries that went up from the crowd. But Night Hawk was perfectly calm, and said:

"No, I do not intend that they shall hang, at least now."

"But I called you together to hear me tell them that they have got to get out of this country with all speed."

"The Rio Grande is not very far away, and there are friends there awaiting them."

"If they ever return to this country again, on any pretense, show them no mercy, for they will come but to rob and murder."

"Neither my brother or myself, Scraps or Red Wolf will be merciful another time."

"Unbind them, Scraps, and let them go."

"Better hang 'em now and save trouble another time," said a cowboy.

"No, they go free now; but we have given them warning."

"Don't take life without good cause, gentlemen; but if they return you will have cause."

"Are they ready, Scraps?"

"Yes, sah."

"Men, mount and be off, and forget not the warning."

Not a word did they utter, but putting spurs to their horses they dashed away amid the jeers of their earnest companions, and they took the nearest trail to the Rio Grande.

Soon after the rancheros and the cowboys departed, after thanking the Buckskin Brothers for having trailed the traitors to earth.

"Well, Scraps, what do you and Red Wolf intend to do now?" asked Broncho Bill, as the four were left alone together.

"Lordy, gemmens, I don't know."

"Well, what do you say to going with us?" asked Night Hawk.

Even Red Wolf's almost bronze face showed pleasure at this, and so it was decided that Red Wolf and Scraps should join the Buckskin Brothers.

And thus it was, long after that, they were, as the reader will remember, with Night Hawk and Broncho Bill on some mysterious service which caused them to find a camp in the ruin of the Old Mission, which had been avoided by hunters, cowboys and Indians as the abode of spooks.

That the Phantom which haunted the place was caught with a lariat by Broncho Bill, the

reader will also recall, and now the thread of my story will be taken up once more at the old ruined Mission.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CAMP IN THE RUIN.

WHEN Scraps approached the spot where George and Will Powell stood, conversing with the strange inhabitant of the old ruin, he was certainly in great trepidation.

He had taken to flight in actual belief that he would find a ghost riding behind him before he went very far.

Plunging across the ford, he had set off over the prairie at a pace which threatened to distance even a spirit pursuer.

But Scraps was an odd character. He was superstitious, as are all of his race, and in fact about half the white race are, also, only they won't admit it.

But Scraps was daring to a degree of recklessness, as has been seen, if he did not have to face what he supposed was from the spirit land.

He had found it very hard to muster up courage to go after the remains of his master and bring them back to be buried near the ruin.

Had it been any one else, Scraps never would have gone.

But when he saw the phantom barring their way to the ruined mission, it was too much for him, and he was off like a shot.

He dared not at first glance behind him.

But after going a short distance, and finding that neither the Comanche nor the scouts were following him, he felt ashamed and drew rein.

Then he mustered up courage and looked behind him.

No ghost was upon his saddle-crupper.

He glanced back toward the ruin.

Not a sound greeted his ears, not a soul did he see.

What had become of the scouts and of Red Wolf?

Had the ghosts gobbled them up?

Scraps hoped not but feared so.

Then he made up his mind that what others could face he should not be afraid of, and so he decided to move back upon the ruin.

Just then he heard a heavy splashing of water toward the river.

"Dat hain't no ghost, I reckons," he muttered.

But he came to a halt, for he had been moving slowly back toward the river.

Soon he heard hoof-beats, and a moment after a horseman appeared in sight.

He was not robed in white, did not ride a snowy horse, and so Scraps stood his ground.

"It's Red Wolf," he said, after a while.

"Ho, black chief," called out Red Wolf, who always honored Scraps with that title, greatly to his delight.

"Yes, red chief, I'm right here."

The Comanche drew rein by the side of the negro and said:

"White chief say come."

"And the ghostesses?"

"Woman!"

"What! a woman's ghostesses?"

"Pale-face woman, no spirit!"

"Ah!" and Scraps brightened up, but then asked dubiously:

"Is you sart'in 'bout dat, Red Wolf?"

"Comanche talk straight."

"I'll go with you," and considerably ashamed of himself for having decamped with such haste, Scraps made up for it by riding back in a run to the ford.

Soon after he halted by the river, but he had approached it very slowly.

"Well, Scraps, the spirit that haunts this old river is this lady who seems to have met with some misfortune, and I wish you to treat her most kindly, and neither you nor Red Wolf, in any way, even refer to her being here," said Night Hawk.

"No, Massa George; but I hain't skeert of yer sure the lady hain't no sperret," Scraps said, cautiously and in a whisper.

The brothers laughed at Scraps' wish to be sure, and Broncho Bill said:

"If you will speak and reassure, Scraps, lady, I am sure he will do all in his power for you."

"I do not wonder that he thinks me a ghost, and that is what I have masqueraded in white for, that both white men and red-skins would so believe me and shun this ruin."

"Your courage is such, senors, as not to dread anything," and the woman turned to the two scouts, while Scraps dismounted, and said, in a voice that was no longer filled with dread:

"I hain't skeered no more now, missus, and ef Scraps kin sarve yer, jist call on him."

The woman now told the scouts where to find a good camping-place, and a fire was built in the chapel, so as not to be seen at a distance, should red-skin or hunter be passing near, and Scraps set to work to get supper.

The surroundings certainly were gloomy, with graves about them of the massacred people who had dwelt there long before, and with the old ruins sheltering them; but the scouts allowed nothing to dampen their spirits, and talked pleasantly with the woman, who, at their request, came and joined them before the fire.

As the firelight fell upon her they saw that her form was slender and graceful, and her long black hair fell in loose waves far below her waist.

But about her head, and drawn over her face she wore a Spanish veil which completely hid every feature excepting her large, glorious eyes.

As she said nothing of who she was, the scouts would not question her; but hoped to see her face when supper was announced.

But she declined any food, saying that she had eaten her frugal meal before their arrival.

Soon after she arose, said she would see them in the morning, and with a bow she glided away.

Scraps did not sleep well that night, but dreamed of spooks and goblins.

He wanted to see that ruin in the daylight, before he would feel content.

As for Red Wolf, with his usual indifference to circumstances and surroundings, he rolled himself in his blanket and was soon fast asleep, while the scouts rested with no dread of being disturbed in that gloomy place.

The morning found Scraps up at break of day, and all were, when they looked about them, more pleased with their surroundings.

There was a vast quantity of grass, which had not been fed over by cattle, and it was the very place for a secret camp.

There were springs about in the woods, trickling away in tiny streams down to the river, and the old ruin loomed up better and more inviting by daylight.

A spot was chosen for a camp, and a cabin of small logs was quickly built, the scouts preferring it to the ruin to sleep in.

The strange occupant of the old chapel appeared by daylight, but still wore her veil, which shielded her face.

Her little room in the chapel was not an unpleasant one, and she told the scouts that she had come there on horseback and accompanied by one person who had brought her certain articles to make her as comfortable as she could be in the wild, solitary life she led.

Who that one person was she did not say, nor was she asked.

Her attire was coarse, yet neat, and both Night Hawk and Broncho Bill wondered at the strange mystery which had caused her to seek a refuge in that drear spot, with no companionship about her.

That which had brought the scouts to seek the ruin, was a desire to occupy a position convenient to the Rio Grande, and from whence they could spy out certain movements of outlaws, who were committing at times certain depredations upon Texan rancheros and settlers.

Since they had driven the four cowboys away from Ranchero's Rest, with a warning never to return, they had not been again seen upon Texan soil.

For some time after this all had gone well, and Giant Saul had disappeared mysteriously from the haunts which had known him.

There were those who asserted that Giant Saul, Nick Rawlings, Sim Lucas and the others whom the scouts had so promptly exiled, had joined the band of Cowboy Pirates under San Cruz, a bold and merciless Mexican, who waged war against Texas for both revenge and gold it was said.

As to whether the five cowboys had joined San Cruz or not, no proof could be given.

But, after a season of comparative rest from raids along the Rio Grande frontier, suddenly once more the Comanche had started up on the war-path, and the Cowboy Pirates again began their raids into Texan territory.

The scouts had been dwelling at their own ranch, and thither both Red Wolf and Scraps had accompanied them, and most useful did they make themselves about the place.

But with the stirring up of new troubles both Night Hawk and Broncho Bill had reported at the fort for duty.

They were at once dispatched by Major Loring upon a scouting expedition to discover all that could be found out about the movements of the Comanches, and the raids of the Cowboy Pirates.

They were gone for several weeks and then returned to the fort and made their report.

They felt assured, so they told the major, that the Comanches had been urged upon the war-path once more by San Cruz the Cowboy Pirate Chief, who intended to take advantage of the Indian war to once more strike at the rich ranches in Texas.

"We are further convinced, major, that the old game is being played once more, of having spies among the cowboys on the ranches, and we will have to hunt them out."

"As this is a most important matter, for the Cowboy Pirates can do a vast deal of damage, if their raids are not put an end to, Will and myself, with our red and black pardes, will take the matter in hand and we hope to render a good report."

"I have every confidence that you will, Powell, and if you need troops only send for them, for Dana is most anxious to get off on another expedition with you, so that he can add new laurels to his fame," replied the major, and the scouts set off on their return to their ranch to get their two allies, Red Wolf and Scraps, and make ready for their perilous work of trailing the Cowboy Pirates to the bitter end.

CHAPTER XXII.

UNFORGOTTEN.

As both Night Hawk and Broncho Bill well understood the full danger of their undertaking, against the outlaws of the frontier, they wished to go in every way prepared for all emergencies which might occur.

Their rifles and revolvers needed overhauling, and their saddles and bridles could be bettered by some additions and mending.

Then they wished a bountiful supply of ammunition of all kinds, and a completely new outfit for camp life, with boots and clothing for themselves, and their red and black companions.

To get all these they had to go to the nearest city, and so they set off at once for San Antonio.

They had made their purchases and were waiting for them to be gotten all ready for them, which would take until the morrow, and so Broncho Bill suggested that they should attend the theater that night, as there was an operatic company in town.

Night Hawk was only too willing, and securing good seats the Buckskin Brothers settled themselves to enjoying the performance.

The curtain rose, and the performance began. But when the "star" made her appearance all eyes were upon her, for she won hearts by her beauty of face and form ere she had opened her mouth to sing a note.

Her beauty was simply entrancing, for every feature was perfection, and with large, deer-like eyes she possessed a wealth of red-gold hair.

"Where have I seen her before?" asked Broncho Bill, in a whisper of Night Hawk, who responded:

"I was just asking myself that question—but hark!"

She had begun to sing, and with the first notes that fell from her lips there was a silence like death in that house.

There were rough men there, many of them wild frontiersmen, and people of all conditions and classes.

But she captured every heart, as she had won their admiration, when her superb voice rung in sweetest accents through the crowded house.

"I have seen her before," said Night Hawk, almost aloud, and Broncho Bill responded:

"And so have I."

Then the singing ended, and the sound of applause that followed fairly shook the building.

Again and again she bowed, smiling sweetly at her admirers, and evidently proud of her triumph, but the audience would not be stilled—they fairly commanded an encore.

In response the orchestra again struck up, and stepping forward the beautiful woman began that touching ballad which finds its way into every true soul—"Annie Laurie."

Hardly had she sung the first line when in suppressed tones came from the lips of Night Hawk:

"Good God!"

"Why, George, what is the matter?" anxiously asked Will Powell.

But Night Hawk bowed his head and neither answered or moved.

At last the song ended, and amid the thunders that followed, the shouts of the wild element present, and the bravos, Night Hawk eagerly grasped the arm of his brother, while he said excitedly:

"That is the woman, Will!"

"What woman, George?"

"The one I told you of."

"George, have you been drinking?"

"Will, do you not remember that I told you how I overheard a woman sing, in the next room to mine, when I was at the hotel in New York?"

"Yes, I remember now."

"That is she."

"But you did not see her."

"No, but I heard her, and I could never mistake that voice."

"You are right, you could not."

"But you may recall that I told you she sung a verse of Annie Laurie?"

"I do; it all comes back to me now, though it was quite a long time ago."

"I remember the conversation, too, as you repeated it to me."

"Well, Will, that is the woman."

"You think there can be no doubt?"

"None."

"Her name, if I remember, was Clio?"

"Yes, and see her on this programme."

"It is *Mademoiselle Cleopatra*."

"I do believe you are right, George."

"I know I am."

"Well, in the language of the borderman I ask:

"What are you going to do about it?"

"What can I do, Will?"

"I don't see."

"Nor I."

"I wish we could meet her, for she has fairly captivated me."

"She is very charming, but it would not do to send in my name, and then tell her I would like to make her acquaintance because I was an eavesdropper once to her conversation with her husband."

"No, for again in border parlance, George, you might get *fixed*; but why is it that both of us seem to think that we have seen her before?"

"Will?"

"Yes."

"I have an idea."

"Don't let it escape, George."

"It may be a foolish one; but somehow I connect her with the miniature which Scraps gave us to send back to that lady who jilted his master."

"You've struck the trail dead sure."

"That's the woman."

"Don't be too sure."

"Your story was that she had married a man who was a wretch, and she said she would go her own way."

"That lady married another and nearly broke the young ranchero's heart, and—"

"Will, I'll tell you how we can find out."

"Yes."

"Do you remember the writing on the backs of those letters?"

"Well, that is going pretty far back, but I think it was a large, beautiful hand."

"Yes, we remarked it at the time."

"Well?"

"Do you remember that beautiful Mexican bird we saw for sale to-day at the hotel?"

"Yes."

"I'll buy that bird, and send it to her as a token of our admiration for her singing."

"She may send it back."

"Hardly; but if she accepts it she will doubtless write a note, and we'll get a look at her handwriting."

"Brother George, you should have been a lawyer."

"We'll do it."

"But if she is the same, what then?"

This seemed a poser; but, at any rate, the two brothers decided to send the bird.

They remained through the performance, more than ever enchanted, and when it was over, looked up the owner of the bird, bought it with its exquisite cage, and then sent it, with a card bearing their compliments and names, up to the room of the beautiful singer.

In a short while the servant returned with a note.

It read:

"SATURDAY.

"*Mademoiselle Cleopatra* accepts, with many thanks, the very apropos and exquisite souvenir sent her by the Messrs. Powell, and regrets that an early departure in the morning will prevent her having the pleasure of meeting them personally."

This was what the note said.

But Night Hawk said, more emphatically than was his wont:

"It is the same handwriting!"

"It is the woman you overheard sing in the New York hotel. The one who jilted the young ranchero and *Mademoiselle Cleopatra* is one and the same, that is certain," responded Broncho Bill.

CHAPTER XXIII.

STRANGELY MET.

THE next morning, strange to say, the two scouts slept late.

Perhaps it was because there was nothing to be done, as it was the Sabbath, and it might be on account of the very comfortable beds they had.

When they awoke they went down to breakfast, and knowing the landlord, they asked him about the departure of his fair guest, *Mademoiselle Cleopatra*, and at what hour she had departed, for they felt a deep interest in the beautiful woman from the secrets that they knew she carried through life.

"The company departed last night after the performance, but *Mademoiselle Cleopatra* remained over until this morning, when she departed upon what I think a very perilous undertaking."

So replied the landlord, and his words at once deeply interested the two scouts.

"Indeed! What peril can possibly threaten her?" asked Night Hawk.

"The truth is, she went off on the border somewhere."

"On the border?"

"Yes."

"And not with her company?"

"No, the company went on to Galveston, where they are to lay off a week, until the return of the star."

"And the star has gone to the border?" asked Broncho Bill, also deeply interested.

"Yes."

"What border?"

"Over toward the Rio Grande somewhere."

"My heavens! at such a time?"

"She would risk it."

"The country is full of Indians!"

"I urged against it, gentlemen."

"And the Cowboy Pirates are also threatening raids."

"I so told the lady."

"But who did she go with?"

"If I had only known that you were coming, Powell, you and your brother, I would have gotten her to consult you."

"But I did not, and so I asked Joe Farris to find me a good guide and an escort of two men besides for her."

"And he did?"

"Yes."

"Who was it?"

"Harry Otis is the guide."

"And the others?"

"Two Rio Grande men, whose names I do not know, but whom I have often seen."

"Only the three went with her, you say?"

"The three men, and then there was her maid, a French girl, and two large, ferocious dogs, which the lady had a fancy to carry with her."

"My! but they are ugly brutes."

"How did they go?"

"The lady and her maid in an ambulance, which one of the men drove, and the guide and other fellow on horseback."

"Then there were two saddle-horses for the lady and her maid, should they wish to ride."

"I cannot understand it," said Night Hawk.

"Ah! but she went in good style and paid for all she got."

"The ambulance is to be the tent for herself and maid at night, and with those two dogs under it there will be no danger to her."

"Otis is a splendid cook, and she carried along all of the provisions needed."

"But what took her to the frontier?" asked Broncho Bill.

"Well, she told me she was going to seek the grave of one who was very dear to her."

The two scouts looked at each other, but said nothing, and the landlord continued:

"She told me that the one whose grave she was going to had been killed by the Indians, and she wished to find out about it."

"But how was she to find out?"

"She had a letter from some one who lived at a ranch—the place was called *Ranchero's Rest*, I believe—and she was going there to find out what she wished to know."

"She left early this morning you say?"

"Yes, at sunrise."

The scouts suggested to the landlord that he should not have permitted her to go, at least

with so small an escort, and then thanking him for his information they walked away to have a chat together.

"Will, there is not an atom of doubt now?"

"Not the slightest, for she was to go to Ranchero's Rest to get her information."

"Yes, I wrote her, you know, on some of that poor fellow's paper, so headed, and told her that it was his ranch, and would remain under the charge of the faithful servant and friend of the young ranchero, Scraps, or rather Zekiel Tanner, as I put it."

"And she then is not the nameless woman we supposed, from her having jilted the ranchero?"

"So it seems, Will, as she takes so much trouble and goes to so much expense to visit the dead man's grave."

"There is no one to give her information after she gets there."

"True, so what shall we do about it?"

"Our things will not be ready until to-morrow morning."

"That is true."

"Well, suppose we leave Scraps and Red Wolf to come on with the ambulance when it is loaded, and we mount and strike off on the trail of the party?"

"You fear danger to her, as I do?"

"Yes."

"We will go then."

"It is now noon, and she left at sunrise—over twenty miles start of us."

"Yes; but we can overtake her."

"We must."

So saying the scouts retraced their steps to the hotel.

They had come down to the town on horseback, while Scraps had driven the large four-mule ambulance, and Red Wolf had also accompanied them, riding his own mustang.

On the way back to their ranch, there would be little danger to meet, unless from a foraging band of Cowboy Pirates, or a raiding party of Indians extending their way further than was their wont into the country.

So the ambulance would be able to return in safety with Scraps and Red Wolf, and they need have no fear on that score, valuable as was its freight.

Arriving at the hotel, they were met by Scraps, who said in a confidential tone:

"Mars' George, did you an' Mars' Will see a leddy as were stopping at the hotel?"

"Who was she, Scraps?" asked Will Powell.

"She were a great uproar singer, I heard tell; but she went away dis mornin' at sun-up, fer I was jist goin' out ter feed ther am'lance mules, and fore de Lord gemmans, if she wasn't de very image o' that pictur' poor Mars' Henry had, and you sent off for me, then I doesn't know nuffin'."

"Scraps."

"Yas, Mars' George."

"That lady is the very one."

"Lordy!" and Scraps's eyes opened to twice their natural size.

"She has gone off on a very dangerous trip, Scraps, and it is to the Ranchero's Rest, expecting to find you there, and Will and I are going after her."

"We wish you to wait and come on with the ambulance to-morrow, you and Red Wolf, and you are to camp at the Red Willow Spring, and get there as soon as you can."

"Wait there for us, and we will bring the lady with us, for she doubtless wishes to see you and have a talk with you."

"Now we are going to get our traps together to start right after dinner."

Fortunately the weapons of the scouts had at once been put in order on their arrival, and also their saddles, and so they started upon the trail of the beautiful woman well fitted for any danger that might cross their path.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MEETING.

THE trail of the ambulance and the accompanying horses was followed with the greatest care by the scouts, after they had left the roads behind them.

The pace that they kept up was such that they hoped to overtake those they trailed before they should break camp in the morning.

But night caught them yet a long way behind, as they could judge by the trail.

They knew that there was but one course for Otis the guide to pursue, if he knew the way to Ranchero's Rest, which was more than likely, and so, after a rest of a couple of hours, and supper, they started once more, determined to

keep on until they reached the camp, for they could not believe that the lady would wish to travel all night.

They, of course, could not see the trail in the darkness, but went on in a direction they were assured Otis had taken.

All along they kept an eye for the glimmer of a camp-fire, and seeing none, they several times went out of their way to visit some motte, thinking that perhaps Otis's caution had prevented a fire from being made.

But midnight passed, and still there was no sign of those they sought.

At last they halted to rest their horses, and after an hour thus spent, once more pushed on.

The dawn at last grew gray, then rosy in hue, and the sun arose.

But nowhere in view was the party.

"We have passed them in the darkness, Will!"

"Or Otis has taken a roundabout way to get there."

"Let us cut across to the left and see if they have passed on, though they could not unless they traveled as we did, most all night."

"True."

Then they rode along in an oblique direction, and soon their eyes fell upon a trail.

It was the track they had followed.

"How they have pressed on!"

"Indeed they have; but yonder is a stream, and we'll have breakfast while our horses rest."

"And then we must catch them."

"Yes, for this is a very dangerous locality."

The scouts halted, a fire was built, and they had breakfast, a broiled steak from a deer, which Broncho Bill had shot the evening before, a tin cup of coffee and some crackers.

There was good grass and water for the horses, and the hour's rest refreshed all greatly.

Mounting once more the scouts pushed forward at a steady gait, and a rapid one.

At last a large body of timber land loomed up before them, and the trail led through it.

There a halt had been made, and a fire still burning, showed that the party had had breakfast there.

As they were about to ride out of the timber, still following the trail, they suddenly drew rein.

Their eyes, at the same instant, had fallen upon a sight out upon the prairie which had caused both to drag their horses back into the timber, and clutch their rifles firmly.

"Let us give our horses all the rest we can, George," said Broncho Bill, without a word to his brother as to what both saw.

They dismounted and hitched the animals, while they stood gazing out upon the prairie, but so as not to be seen by any one there.

What they saw was the ambulance coming toward the timber.

The two horses were at full speed and the whip was being applied upon them relentlessly.

The reins were held by a woman, and from the rear of the ambulance a rifle flashed forth.

In chase of the flying vehicle were two men, mounted upon mules, while half a mile behind them, and coming more rapidly on, were half a dozen horsemen, and they were gaining upon the fugitives.

Both of the scouts had their field-glasses to their eyes, and Night Hawk said:

"The lady is driving, Will."

"Yes, and some one is firing out from the rear of the ambulance."

"It must be the maid, as the two men so near are not hurt."

"Doubtless; but are they not the two who went as escorts?"

"Yes, for the landlord said they rode mules."

"And where is Otis, the guide?"

"I give it up."

"Those fellows are Cowboy Pirates, in chase."

"Oh, yes."

"Five of them."

"Five and two are seven."

"And we are two; but we will save the lady, for surely something has gone wrong."

They had spoken with the utmost coolness.

At the first glance they had taken in the situation, and had mentally decided upon their course of action.

They had seen that the ambulance was coming back over its trail, and that it would reach the timber before it was overtaken, and that would give them a chance to act.

Their horses had had a short rest, and now the scouts went back to them, mounted and calmly rode to the edge of the timber.

"Now, Will!"

"Ready."

Out they darted, while their well-known

war-cry rung over the prairie and reached the ears of pursuers and pursued.

The ambulance horses were half checked in their speed, then drawn to the right, and then held on once more, as those within seemed to feel that the new-comers were friends not foes.

"Drive on to the timber and wait there."

"We will take care of those fellows," cried Night Hawk, as they drew near the ambulance.

"Thank you! oh thank you, sirs! but those two men are the traitors, and they killed my guide," came in the rich, full voice of Made-moiselle Cleopatra.

"The Powell brothers!"

"The Buckskin Brothers!" yelled the two men on mules, and they halted and raised their revolvers.

But there were two rifles cracked before the revolvers and the mules lost their riders.

But the five horsemen further back on the trail still came on.

Then up to his mouth went Broncho Bill's hand, and once more that startling imitation of a bugle-call rung out.

"I thought so," said Broncho Bill as he saw the Cowboy Pirates turn back, evidently thinking that there were troops in the timber.

The scouts had not halted in their pace and, as the Cowboy Pirates turned in confused flight, they opened fire with their rifles.

The outlaws also fired as they ran; but the matchless rifles of the scouts brought down a horse, and dropped a rider from his saddle.

There was a short stop, and the man, evidently wounded, was taken up, and once more they pressed on in flight, disappearing over a rise of the prairie.

Instantly the scouts turned back, and while Broncho Bill went after the stray mules, Night Hawk halted and examined the two bodies, for they had both seen that the ambulance had come to a halt in the edge of the timber.

"They are the two men that the landlord spoke of, and somehow I always had an idea they were crooked," and Night Hawk calmly rode on his way to the timber.

The panting ambulance horses had been only too willing to stop, and the beautiful woman and her maid, both cool, but pale, greeted Night Hawk as he rode up.

"Oh, sir, you do not know what you saved me from!" cried the beautiful woman, and she grasped both of Night Hawk's hands as she spoke.

"Lady, my brother and myself heard you sing night before last at the theater, and learning that you had come on this dangerous trail, we followed you—"

"Ah! those men called you the Powell brothers."

"You, then, it was who sent me that lovely bird, and thus I meet you."

"How strange it is."

Night Hawk could have told her about the New York hotel affair, but he did not, and Broncho Bill coming up with the captured mules, he introduced him.

"You are two most wonderful men, for I have heard of your exploits and I am so glad to call you my friends."

"But let me tell you that I came hither to visit the grave of one dear to me, one in fact I once expected to marry."

"He was killed on the frontier, and, as I had broken with him, I longed to atone for it by visiting his grave."

"I secured a guide and those two men, whom you killed."

"They killed my guide this morning, and he lies over yonder in the woods, and they carried us on as prisoners, one of them telling me that he was paid to deliver me to the Cowboy Pirates' chief, who would demand a large ransom for my release, and which, alas, I could not have paid, for I am not rich."

"Watching an opportunity, when the two men were not near, as we had halted upon seeing some horsemen, I drove off, and Lizette, my dear maid and friend, fired at our wicked pursuers, though she hardly knew the use of a weapon."

When her story was told, Night Hawk explained that he it was who had written her the letter for the faithful servant of her lover, and told her all that he knew of the young ranchero, adding, that after they had gone to the Red Willow Spring and met Scraps, he and his brother would gladly escort her to the grave.

Then the body of Otis the guide was looked up and buried, after which Night Hawk drove the ambulance, while Broncho Bill took charge of the horses, and the party started for the Red Willow Spring.

CHAPTER XXV.
CONCLUSION.

UPON the arrival of the scouts at the Red Willow Spring, Scraps and Red Wolf were found to have just arrived there, and the negro told the beautiful woman the story of his master's death and his deep love for her.

She was deeply affected, but as both Night Hawk and Bronco Bill, from the news brought by Scraps and Red Wolf, of the movements of the Comanches, urged against her making the trip to the grave of her lover, she decided to return, telling the scouts that she would again come to the town when her season ended, and have them accompany her to the Ranchero's Rest.

They promised to do so, if she would notify them beforehand, and they gave her an address which would reach them, after which they started back to town, while Red Wolf and Scraps were to continue on home and tell their mother they would soon return.

The beautiful singer bade her brave preservers farewell, with tears in her eyes, and never once knew that they held another secret of her life, which was her unhappy marriage.

Then it was, after returning home to their ranch, the scouts got their complete outfit and, with Scraps and Red Wolf started for the old ruined chapel and Mission.

The duty that they went there to perform they faithfully executed, to the satisfaction of Major Loring, and their adventures in doing so will furnish material for another romance to follow.

The mystery of the strange woman who was in hiding in the ruined chapel, they also solved, and found it a case of cruelty, and seeking to rob her of her gold had driven her into that gloomy solitude.

The part which the scouts played in the Comanche war, and in freeing the border of the Cowboy Pirates is well known, and but added fame to the name of the Buckskin Brothers.

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